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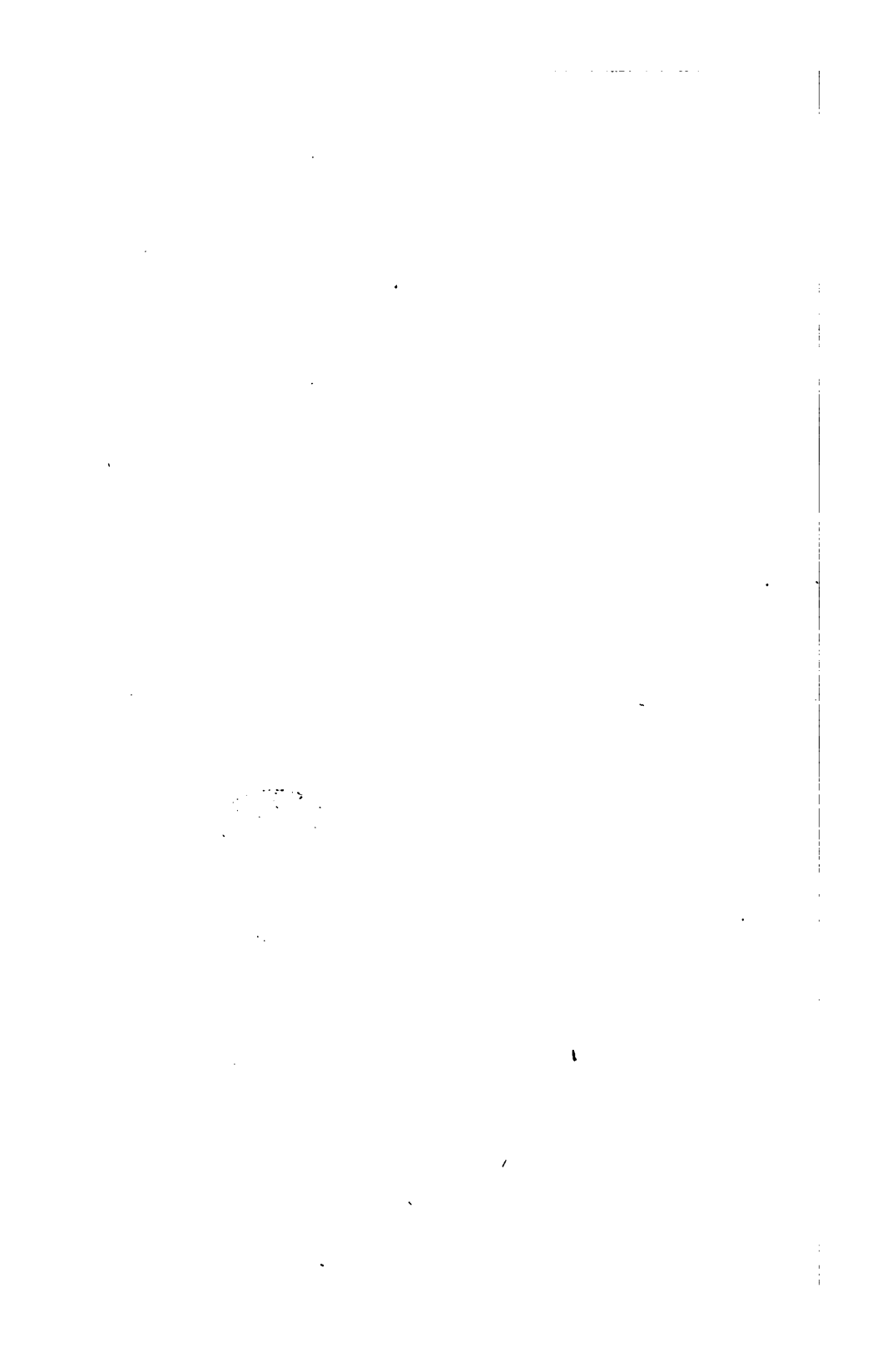
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THE
YOUNG HEIRESS.

A NOVEL.

BY MRS. TROLLOPE,

AUTHOR OF

"FATHER EUSTACE," "THE BARNABYS," &c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES
VOL. I.



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THE YOUNG HEIRESS.

CHAPTER I.

It is not very often in our money-loving and industrious country that we see a house, which has the appearance of being absolutely abandoned by its owner, and apparently permitted to fall into decay as rapidly as its nature shall permit, without any interference from the hand of man either to hasten or delay it. But such was a few years ago the case with a large, dull, heavy-looking mansion in the county of Cornwall.

Yet although there might have been many, who would probably have been well-pleased to occupy so roomy a dwelling at the low

rent for which it might probably have been obtained, nobody came forward to bargain for it; the reason for which perhaps might have been found more in the imaginations of those who turned away from it, than in any prudent consideration for their own interest; for the house really was a good and convenient house, and the garden attached to it, though curiously matted over by a vigorous growth of weeds, was spacious enough to have been both pleasant and convenient.

But the house had an ill name, and nobody, as it seemed, had mental courage enough to set about giving it a better.

The circumstances which led to this evil reputation are well known to me; and as they have appeared to me to possess some interest, I have been tempted to record them in the following narrative.

The name of the family who were the last inhabitants of this house was Rixley. At the time my narrative must begin, it consisted of only four individuals; namely, a father, with one son, one daughter, and one female servant to wait upon them. Mr. Rixley, the father,

was at this time about fifty years of age ; his son was fifteen ; his daughter, twelve ; and the servant who attended them, about forty. Mr. Rixley was one of those people whom some persons declare to be very handsome, while others aver that they are greatly the reverse. It was, however, a matter of fact, which admitted of no dispute, that he was a tall, well-grown, well-proportioned man, with regular, and decidedly handsome, features. The difference of opinion concerning his looks could only arise among those, who suffer their imaginations to be the fool of their other faculties, or else worth all the rest. In short, among those people who were in the habit of seeing more than was absolutely in sight, Mr. Rixley did not appear well-looking, because the various expressions of his countenance—and they were very various—seemed to indicate passions and feelings that were sometimes doubtful, often bad, but never good.

His son inherited his form and his features, though by no means the expression of his countenance ; but his daughter resembled him not at all. She was small for her age,

and very delicately and symmetrically formed; and her features and complexion were likewise of a delicacy and refinement which, in comparing her to her father, could only suggest the idea of contrast, instead of resemblance.

As to the fourth personage who composed this small but very various household, by name Sarah Lambert, she, too, had been, as well as her master, very strikingly handsome; but ill health, or ill temper, or both together, had worn her almost to the thinness of a skeleton; and the magnificent black eyes, which had probably, in the days of her beauty, been the most aidful feature in producing it, had now an almost frightful effect, as they glared from her thin and sallow visage.

Helen Rixley was (as I have said) about twelve years old at the time my narrative begins, and her half-brother three years older. The mother of the boy had been the mistress of his very dissolute father, and had died when her child was about two years old. Within a month after her death, Mr. Rixley left his home at the Warren House, as it

was called, and which was not then quite so desolate as it became afterwards; and, after the absence of a month or two, announced by a letter to his housekeeper that he was married, and that his house and garden were to be set in order, as he should return to it with his bride in the course of a week or two.

The house and garden were, accordingly, put into very nice order; and in the course of a week or two, the master of it arrived with his bride, and a very young and a very lovely bride she proved to be.

Who, or what she was, he never announced to any body; and yet he had no reason to be ashamed of her, for she really was as innocent as she was young, and as good as she was beautiful. The shame of the marriage—if shame there was—did not rest with her, poor girl, but with the hard unfeeling female relative who urged her into it.

She had been left an orphan by the early death of both father and mother, who had made a miserably imprudent marriage; the father being a young fortuneless officer on the eve of being sent to the West Indies,

and the mother, the equally fortuneless daughter of a clergyman, who had performed the duties of a curate in a village near the young man's last English quarters.

A few years' service abroad sufficed to terminate all the mortal cares of the young father, and the young mother returned with a baby to England, with no provision but a tiny pension, and no relative to assist her, save a maiden aunt, who proclaimed, and considered, herself as the most noble-minded of women for giving her shelter.

The young widow, however, did not trouble her long, and moreover contrived, during the few years she lived, to pay a very sufficient remuneration for the maintenance of herself and her child by means of selling her very clever water-colour drawings to a Bond-street furnisher of costly albums.

The maiden aunt showed no very affectionate kindness, perhaps, in placing the little orphan girl in a sort of apprenticeship to a good school in the neighbourhood of London; but, as a measure of prudence, she could have done nothing better, and, moreover, by a happy chance, the desolate child

did not encounter any of the cruelties and hardships which are often said to attend such a position. The object of so placing her was the hope that it might enable her to get her bread as a teacher in the school, or as governess in some private family; and being really well taught, and moreover exceedingly apt to learn, it is probable that this result might have been easily obtained, had not another mode of maintaining her been offered, and eagerly accepted by the maiden aunt.

It chanced that in one of the short and far-between visits of Helen Herbert to the country-town residence of this old lady, she was seen, and very passionately admired, by Mr. Rixley, who was then still a young and decidedly a very handsome man. Nevertheless, the young Helen did not admire him by many degrees so much as he admired her, and would very greatly have preferred returning to her promised post of teacher at the school to the becoming Mrs. Rixley.

Had she been a few years older she might have made more resolute and more successful efforts to decide this question for herself;

but she was only seventeen, and the habit of obedience was still so inveterate in her that she yielded with but little resistance, and arrived in due time at the Warren House in the character of its mistress.

Perhaps in these its best days the said Warren House had nothing very beautiful or exhilarating in its aspect; but whatever was the cause, it is certain that the young and lovely Mrs. Rixley was not in any way enchanted or exhilarated by finding herself there.

In fact, the only thing that appeared greatly to interest her in her new home was the beautiful little boy whom she found trotting about there with just about the same degree of licence and of favour as we usually see accorded to a domestic pet. Nothing, in fact, could more accurately describe his condition than the words of the old song—

“ Now fondled, now chid,
Permitted, forbid,
It was leading the life of a dog.”

But even this degree of favour was accorded more by the servants of the house than its

master ; for though the bright-looking little seraph was suffered to come and to go, when the parlour door happened to be open, without absolutely being kicked out of the way, it was but rarely that his hard-natured father deigned to look at him, and never from the hour of his birth, which had cost his unfortunate mother the loss of family and friends, had he ever been seen to bestow a caress upon him.

This wretched mother had lived in the most perfect seclusion at the Warren House ; but during the two years which preceded her death, she had learned to welcome the departure and mourn the return of her seducer, on whose affections, although she continued to be called by his name, and to appear to be mistress of his house, she had evidently ceased to have any hold within a very few months of her residence with him.

As long as she lived, poor young creature, her beautiful child had been her idol, though she could scarcely feel him to be a consolation ; but it seemed to be the pretty boy's fate to make the mournful seclusion of the Warren House endurable to its female inha-

bitants; for when a real Mrs. Rixley took possession of it, his pretty ways occasioned her the only pleasure and amusement she seemed capable of feeling.

Nor did her fondness for him cease, when she had a child of her own to share it. The birth of her little girl was, nevertheless, an event of immense importance to her. Had she ever loved her husband, the evident loss of his affection, of which she was made fully aware within a very few months after their marriage, would doubtless have, in a great degree, poisoned the happiness which the birth of her little daughter occasioned; but, as it was, she too, like her still more unfortunate predecessor, learnt to welcome his departure from home with as keen a feeling of joy as happier wives welcome a husband's return.

As to the cause of his long and frequent absences she knew nothing. He used his house much as a traveller might use a well-known inn, coming and going without ceremony, and without thinking it necessary to give notice either of the one or the other.

The Warren House was a very isolated

mansion, being at nearly a mile's distance from the parish church, and rather more from the little village to which it belonged; and the detached mansions of the few gentlemen's families resident in the neighbourhood were at a somewhat greater distance still. The reason of this sort of isolation was obvious, arising from the immediate vicinity of a wide-spreading rabbit warren, which had given its name to the house occupied by Mr. Rixley, and its dreary aspect to the land immediately surrounding it.

The remoteness of its situation must always have rendered it a lonely and unsocial sort of dwelling; and its present owner's manner of life had, of course, rendered it still more so.

The doubts which were speedily circulated respecting the first Mrs. Rixley's right to the name not only kept these few and distant neighbours from coming near her, but seemed left as a legacy to the second Mrs. Rixley also; and the village doctor was for a long time the only one of their neighbours who ventured to bring his wife to call upon her.

But the sort of suspicion which at first ap-

peared to attach to her wore away by degrees : her little girl was taken to church to be christened, and was duly entered in the register as Helen, the daughter of George Rixley and of Helen, his wife; whereas, in the case of little William, the ceremony of christening in the parish church was omitted altogether; and this difference was considered to be a very satisfactory proof that the second Mrs. Rixley had better claims to the civility of the neighbourhood than the first.

But as this satisfactory event did not take place till nearly a twelvemonth after the real Mrs. Rixley was installed in her mansion, the visits of her neighbours were neither made, nor received, perhaps, very cordially; and, excepting in the case of Mr. Foster, the apothecary, and his family, these visits never led to any great intimacy. The habits and manners of Mr. Rixley himself were not, indeed, such as to lead to intimacy; for although he occasionally returned the hospitalities he accepted by giving, about twice a-year, a very ostentatious dinner to those whose dinners he had eaten, the repulsive stiffness

of his manner was never relaxed towards any one.

He was no sportsman, and, therefore, never met his neighbours in the field: he never mounted a horse, and, therefore, never made a morning visit: and, moreover, he was so often absent for weeks and even months together, that, excepting at these formal dinner parties, he was very rarely seen by his neighbours at all.

There was but one amusement or occupation to which he was known to be attached, and to this one he certainly was attached even passionately, and this was BOATING.

The Warren House at Crumpton was situated in the midst of a mile or two of tolerably level, but very lofty and bleak, table-land, which reached to the edge of one of the boldest cliffs on the coast of Cornwall; and it was on the turbulent element over which that bleak cliff hung that the master of the Warren House found the only recreation which its neighbourhood seemed capable of affording him.

A frightfully steep flight of rude steps, rarely trod by any feet but his own, and

those of the out-of-door servant, who *sometimes* cleaned the shoes of the family, but *always* took care of the fine boat belonging to its master, led from a dip in this cliff to the rocky beach below, where, in a curiously tranquil little creek, was erected a large and very costly boat-house, so well placed and so firmly constructed as pretty safely to defy the storms of that stormy coast.

And in this boat-house dwelt the thing that was very decidedly dearer to Mr. Rixley than either wife, mistress, child, or any other thing whatever.

But his pleasure in it was savagely solitary; for though the boatman who always accompanied him, and another sailor who often did so when the battling breeze was too strong for one alone to combat—though both these men were highly paid and highly valued servants—the idea of their sharing his pleasure no more entered his head than the idea that the sails, the rudder, or the oars enjoyed it.

That Mr. Rixley loved the sea at all times and in all variations of weather was clearly proved by the many hours he passed

upon it in heat and cold, in storm and calm, in sunshine and in torrents of rain. A violent thunder-storm, indeed, was his especial delight; and the only state of atmosphere which ever kept him for a whole day on shore when at Crumpton was that of dense and hopeless fog, or perfect calm. But it was evident that this dislike of a fog arose in no degree from any consciousness or fear of danger; for never was his eagerness to embark so great, and so evidently uncontrollable, as when imminent risk of life was not only threatened, but positively present with him.

Upon these occasions it was his invariable habit to bestow a very liberal largesse on the boatmen on leaving the little vessel, and another on the following morning, if, on revisiting the boat-house, he found his darling craft well secured, and in all respects well cared for.

But he was most sternly arbitrary in exacting their obedience on occasions when the state of the elements was such as would have made it only commonly prudent, had they refused to risk their lives in compliance with

his commands; and he had very correctly calculated the price at which they would consent to run the risk he proposed to them. That price he paid without a moment's hesitation; and had these nautical slaves of the purse more fully comprehended the desperate wilfulness of the man they had to deal with, they might easily and habitually have extorted a much heavier tax than he had ever paid.

Once, and fortunately only once, the life of the assistant boatman was sacrificed to the sort of brutal intrepidity with which Mr. Rixley defied all the dangers of a tremendous storm, for the sake of enjoying the godlike sport (as he called it *to himself*, for he never expressed that, or any other of his strange peculiarities, to mortal man) of rising out of the depths of a sea chasm, in order to ride aloft on the foamy crest of a sea wave. Once, while enjoying this pastime, he saw the man, who was engaged on some manœuvre at the head of the boat, fairly knocked over by a wave, and then washed into the sea by the same wave on its return. All the efforts made by Mr. Rixley and the other man to

save him were vain ; and the poor fellow sank before their eyes to rise no more.

This event, of course, made a good deal of noise in the neighbourhood ; and the rashness of Mr. Rixley was also, of course, much blamed ; but when a donation of two hundred pounds to the poor man's widow was paid into the hands of the village lawyer, with instructions to settle one hundred and fifty of it upon his little orphan girl, and to place the remaining fifty in the savings'-bank in the name of the widow, as a fund to supply her immediate wants, there was not a voice to be heard discussing the tragical event that was not loud in praise of the brave gentleman's noble generosity ; and the accident by no means tended to make the fishermen, or their sons either, less willing to accompany the Warren House squire whenever he asked for their services. He had shrewdly guessed that so it would be, and was by no means inclined to quarrel with the adventure.

But notwithstanding the lavish liberality with which Mr. Rixley repaid all services rendered to him in pursuit of this darling amusement, he was neither greatly loved nor

respected by a single individual among those he employed. Even his fearlessness, which in most cases is a very highly-esteemed quality by all whose lives are passed in the presence of danger, had in no degree endeared him to them. Had any among them been nice in expressing distinctions, he would have been oftener called rash than brave by them; and very justly, for the mental condition which deserves the name of courage was as unknown to him as the sensations of a fainting fit; and if he laughed aloud while his attendants turned pale with fear, it was only because his inordinate enjoyment of vehement sensations made the fitful blustering of the roaring wind, and the mad dancing of the foaming waves, more agreeable to him than the loveliest stillness which heaven ever permitted to rest upon the bosom of a summer sea.

It will easily be believed that in this his favourite—or rather his only—pastime, his wife and children had no share. In fact, they had very little more of his society when he was dwelling at the Warren House, than when he was absent from it; and, fortunately

for her happiness, his wife was by no means disposed to mourn over this neglect as one of the evils of her destiny, but, on the contrary, to consider it as a most important alleviation of her unhappy position ; and such it certainly was.

Neither was she, for the most part, in any way annoyed by the interference of her husband in the arrangement of her domestic concerns. She hired servants and dismissed them, according to her own judgment, will, and pleasure, he having told her in a very peremptory manner, upon the first occasion of the kind that offered, that she must never again trouble him by any reference on such a subject.

Once, indeed, it happened, a year or two after their marriage, that the servant who attended on the children was dismissed by him, in consequence of her having, as he said, answered him impertinently ; but this interference was by no means exercised rudely, as far as concerned his wife, whatever it might have been to the servant he dismissed ; for with much more civility and observance than he was in the habit of showing her, he apologised for having put her to inconvenience by

this sudden dismissal, adding that he had made the best atonement he could for it by making inquiries in every direction for a well-recommended nursemaid to take her place, and that he had succeeded in hearing of a young woman who had already filled a similar situation, and of whom he had received so high a character as to make him expect that she would be a perfect treasure to her and to the children.

The time of most ladies might have hung heavily upon their hands in the situation in which Mrs. Rixley was placed; but it was not so with her. The education she had received became a great blessing to her. She had inherited her mother's talent and taste for drawing; and the teaching she had received in the art had been excellent, and excellently well put to profit: she was as good a linguist as any young girl could be who had never left her native land, and who had never had time or opportunity before her marriage to read anything beyond her class-books. She had an excellent ear, and had been justly considered as the best pianoforte player at the school; and she could

have sung too, and very sweetly, had any one ever wished to hear her.

But not even all this most fortunate treasure of resource would have sufficed to occupy her time so completely as it was occupied, had she not speedily taken a mother's interest in the beautiful, but utterly neglected, child, whom she found running about her husband's house as the acknowledged son of its master, but receiving no more notice from him than if he had been a foundling left at his door.

There were many vices deeply rooted, and deeply hidden too, in the heart of Mr. Rixley; but their concealment was for the sake of convenience, and did not in any case proceed from hypocrisy, for no man could well be more indifferent to the opinion of his fellow creatures. Mr. Rixley was a rich man, and rich men may easily gratify their whims, and their passions too, without exposing themselves to any penalty enforced by the laws. Had he been a poor man the case would have been widely different. But although he could do, and did do, pretty nearly all the evil which it suited his inclination to achieve without making himself amenable to the laws

he was aware that if all his transactions were known, it would in all probability be productive of inconvenience to him ; and he, therefore, did a great many things that nobody knew anything about but himself.

Farther than this, however, his hypocrisy did not go. He did not think it necessary to affect a virtue when he had it not, for he would not have given up a sail in his boat, or any other gratification to which he was attached, for the sake of being considered as the most virtuous man in existence by every human being of his acquaintance. And therefore it was that his wife discovered, before she had been twenty-four hours in his house, that he had a heart as hard as a stone, and not a thousandth part so much amiable feeling as the cat who lay on the hearth-rug and caressed its kitten as it ran over her.

On the whole perhaps, it was well for her that this discovery was made so speedily, and so decisively. Had she loved the man to whom she had been given as a wife, the case would here again have been very different ; but as it was, it was far better for her to.

understand him thoroughly, and understand her own position also at once.

In achieving this she made no blunder whatever.

He remained with her for about a fortnight after their return home as the most impassioned of lovers, and as she thought, poor young thing, as the most disagreeable of men; and then he left her; why, or whither he went she knew not at all, and certainly cared not much. Her childhood though not unprofitably spent, had never been childishly gay, and had never been youthfully happy, and now the quiet stillness of her almost solitary home was infinitely less shocking to her than it would have been to most girls of the same age.

In the course of this honey fortnight he had besought her to tell him if there was anything she wished for, which his house did not contain, and which the neighbouring little town could not supply, adding that he was writing to a friend in London, who would execute any commission she would give with all possible attention to her wishes.

In reply to this obliging offer she had

answered very readily that she should be greatly obliged to him if he would subscribe to a library for her, and make arrangements for a regular transmission of a book-box for her, about once a month.

The request was complied with, amidst abounding caresses, and the standing order given in consequence of it having never been rescinded, she had continued in the enjoyment of this very consolatory indulgence to the day of her death.

And it was well she had it, for she wanted that, and every other consolation within her reach to enable her to endure the many painful features of her strange destiny. She was indeed very speedily released from the oppressive fondness of her ill-matched mate, and not unfrequently from his presence also for many weeks together, and for this she was very truly thankful. But nevertheless her life was a painfully strange one for so very young a woman. Her good and steady friend, Mrs. Foster, the worthy wife of the village doctor, often told her that she might easily put herself upon a more intimate and pleasant footing with the ladies of the neighbourhood, if she

would shew them any indication that she wished it, for they were all disposed to like, and think well of her. But poor Mrs. Rixley had no courage to try the experiment. It is true that her husband never enquired what she did during his absence, but she felt very reasonably certain, that if anything like intimacy were established between her and her neighbours, his cold and repulsive manners to them would be a ceaseless source of embarrassment, and annoyance.

And so she lived on in her studious solitude, her dearly loved step-child, and her own darling little girl being her pastime as long as their babyhood lasted, and her well-instructed pupils afterwards.

That she should dearly love her own, and only child, and be dearly loved by her in return, was certainly not very extraordinary, nor in any way out of the common course of things: but there was something more than common in the attachment which existed between her, and the little William. Pity for his neglected condition had first opened her young and truly feminine heart to the motherless and neglected boy, and his bright

beauty, and bright intelligence had rapidly increased this pitying tenderness, till her love for him very nearly, if not quite, equalled the love she felt for her own child ; while, on his part, his devoted affection for her seemed to call forth, and keep in full action all the energy of his excitable and ardent spirit.

CHAPTER II.

MY retrospect ought to have been condensed into the reasonable bounds of one chapter; I have, however, exceeded this, and must give another to it—but my narrative is still retrospective.

A manner of life so unvarying as that of Mrs. Rixley cannot be exposed to any change, however apparently trifling, without such a degree of attention being excited by it, as to make it appear of some importance. And so it happened with the recluse of the Warren House when her nursery maid was dismissed by her husband, and a stranger introduced in her stead.

Had Mrs. Rixley's life and occupations been less isolated, and less abundant in opportunities for solitary and fanciful lucu-

brations, she would probably have been satisfied by perceiving that this new attendant upon the children appeared to understand her business extremely well, and was regular and attentive in the performance of it; but though these valuable qualities were by no means overlooked, or undervalued by her meditative young mistress, this did not suffice to prevent her fancying that the young woman had something strangely capricious in her disposition, although this supposed caprice never interfered with the performance of the duties assigned to her.

For a long time, however, the idea that this Sarah Lambert was subject to occasional fits of ill temper greatly lessened the confidence which her general good conduct was calculated to inspire; for poor solitary Mrs. Rixley was grievously tormented with the idea that if the deep gloom, which sometimes appeared so legibly stamped on the handsome and expressive features of this important functionary, were to seize on her while walking with the children on the "beetling cliff," she might be strangely tempted to save them and herself also from all future human ills,

by tossing them over the rock, and flinging herself after them.

But by degrees these vague imaginings in a great degree wore themselves out, and well they might, for the woman's devotion to the children was unbounded, and if any danger could be rationally feared from her attendance on them, it must have been found in the risk they both ran of being, in nursery phrase, spoiled; for it was very evident that if left wholly to herself she would have indulged them much beyond the limits of discretion.

But Mrs. Rixley was not wholly wrong in thinking, and in feeling, that there was often something singularly puzzling in the aspect and manner of this young woman. Most people would have allowed her to be extremely handsome, though there were many, of whom her mistress was one, who thought that the expression of her magnificent eyes was more startling, than agreeable.

These marvellous eyes were large, long, dark, and lustrous, and there were moments, for instance when they were fixed with almost passionate tenderness on the little William, when neither her mistress, nor any one else

could deny that they were the most beautiful eyes they ever beheld.

But Mr. Foster, who was a "travelled man," having been a navy surgeon in his youth, explained the mystery of this unwonted brilliancy, and vehemence of expression, by pronouncing very confidently that the eyes were Greek eyes, and that, though it was possible one of her parents might have been English, it was quite certain in his judgment that the other must have had a different origin. Whether he were right or wrong in this conjecture was never likely to be known, for no one ever heard the tall, dark-eyed, grave-looking Sarah Lambert talk of herself, or any one belonging to her.

To her mistress she was respectfully obedient, and rigidly observant of her wishes, as respected the arrangements of the nursery: but there was a coldness in her manner which not all the familiarity arising from lengthened service, or sympathy of feeling concerning the children, could remove. Whether this manner arose from dislike, or from respect, it would have been difficult to say, but whatever its cause it was

not agreeable, and the less so from the striking contrast which it formed to her manner with the children, which was always fondly caressing, and sometimes almost impassioned in its tenderness.

Mrs. Rixley's studious habits—for the solitary life she led had converted more than one of her pursuits into studies—often prevented her from leaving the house in the morning, even in the most tempting season of the year; for as the children advanced in age, her occupation as sole instructor to them both constantly employed four or five hours of the early part of the day, and when they were dismissed to their sports in the garden, she was wont to sit down either to read, or to draw, and would often remain thus engaged till the daylight failed her.

Upon one occasion when this had happened three or four days successively, without her having taken any exercise at all, she began to feel that she wanted the fresh air, and that she had sat still too long.

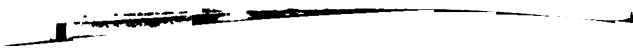
The day had been warm, and the children having been indulged with a long evening ramble had gone both of them early to bed,

so it was alone, and not with the sturdy little William trotting as usual by her side, that she set forth to take a moonlight walk upon the cliff.

The breeze from the sea was deliciously cool, without bringing any chilling quality with it; and she strolled on, and on, till she had far exceeded the usual limits of her evening walk.

At length she reached the point where the steps, leading to the beach and the boat-house, were situated, and for a moment she felt a strong inclination to descend them; for although her strangely-tempered husband had never once invited her either to accompany him in his boat, or even to walk with him to the beach, which formed the most attractive feature of their residence, she had found out, and enjoyed its beauty in that happier portion of her existence, during which his absence from home left her free from any risk of meeting him, either on the cliff, or under it.

When she took the children with her to the beach, she availed herself of an approach somewhat more circuitous, but much less



dangerous ; but when alone she had so often taken this shorter way, that she no longer felt any fear in treading it.

But now, though the moon shone brightly, she hesitated when she reached the point where the opening in the cliff, looking more like a dark chasm, than a stair, yawned at her feet, and after the doubt of a moment she discreetly turned away, determined for this time to be contented with looking on the moon-lit sea from the heights, without attempting to approach it more nearly.

This resolution was the more easily taken, because there was a little hollow sheltered nook, at no great distance from the place whence the steps descended, which was well known to her as offering the most commodious seat imaginable from whence to look out upon the ocean, and the bold sweep of towering rocks by which it was bordered. To this nook she now turned her steps, and having seated herself in the turfy hollow, she rejoiced in the prudence which had brought her to a spot so every way enjoyable, instead of seeking the doubtful pleasure of a scramble down the cliff.

She had not, however, enjoyed this snug position long, before she became aware that the almost certain solitude which had often rendered it so agreeable as a resting place, was not quite so certain by night, as by day, for ere she had been seated many minutes, she distinctly heard voices discoursing aloud at no great distance from her. She speedily became aware, however, that the speakers were approaching the summit of the cliff by the steps from which she had just before turned away, and she rejoiced anew at the discretion which had prevented her meeting them, and this not only because she wished not at such an hour to meet any one, but because the doing so, even by broad daylight, would have led to the awkward necessity of the ascending party going down, or the descending party going up, for to pass each other would have been pretty nearly impossible.

Her satisfaction, moreover, was the more complete, because there was now no sort of necessity that she should be seen by the approaching strangers at all; for nothing could be more easy than for her so to place herself within a few feet of the place where she was

sitting, as to be quite beyond the reach of any passing eyes.

The change of position necessary to ensure this did not occupy a moment, but the manoeuvre had not been long accomplished, when a voice vibrated upon her ear, which she instantly knew to be that of her husband.

He had been absent from the Warren House nearly a month, but as he had condescended to tell her when he left it that it was his purpose to be absent for two, she was as much surprised as chagrined at his unexpected return. Had she not believed his continued absence certain, she would have been far more likely to betake herself to the safe solitude of her bed-room than to have wandered within reach of his so well-known haunt, as the steps leading to his boat-house.

She rejoiced, however, most sincerely, that the timid fit had seized her, which had prevented her meeting him, face to face, where it would have been next to impossible for him not to offer her the assistance of his arm; and it was now so long since anything so nearly approaching conjugal kindness had passed between them, that the necessity for

it would probably have been equally disagreeable to both parties.

The rocky crag which so effectually prevented Mrs. Rixley from being seen from the path above the hollow nook in which she had placed herself, in no way impeded her being able to see the persons who traversed it, and she soon perceived that the companion of her husband was a woman.

Unfortunately for the reputation of the gentleman, the frequency of this sort of companionship with persons of the very lowest class was too notorious for his wife to be ignorant of it, and the pain arising from seeing him thus approaching to within a few feet of her, with his arm thrown round his companion, arose chiefly from the disagreeable consciousness that accident had now made her a spy upon his actions, while fully aware that the peaceful tenor of her existence was the result of her careful avoidance of everything approaching to interference with his mode of passing his time, either at home or abroad.

So genuine was her wish to preserve herself in this state of ignorance, that as the

pair approached her place of concealment, she actually closed her eyes that she might not by possibility recognize the woman who was his companion.

"Almeria! you are an idiot!" were the first words which she distinctly heard, as the pair approached her. They were uttered in the deep voice of her husband, and though they indicated reproach, there was something in the accent with which they were uttered, which showed plainly that whether idiot, or not, "Almeria" was not an object of indifference.

"You know," he said, "that let who will come into the house, you are the only one, either in it, or out of it, for whom I really feel attachment. Then why cannot this content you? You cannot have forgotten that I told you, from the very first, that desperately as I was in love with you, I never would submit to be tormented by a woman's jealousy. Have you forgotten this?"

If his companion replied to this question, it was either by a sign, or a whisper, for no sound was heard by Mrs. Rixley, who would gladly, poor lady, have submitted to the

fatigue of walking a dozen miles before she slept, could she equally well have escaped hearing what was to follow. But so it was not to be.

"Now just tell me, Almeria, will you," resumed Mr. Rixley, in a tone that might have been heard distinctly, even had he been less near to his concealed wife, for the pair had now reached a point of the path that was almost exactly above the unfortunate lady's head, "just tell me how you think it happens that the doll of a woman I have got at home is suffered by me to go on there, year after year, as the mistress of my house?"

"The question is easily answered," replied his companion. "She remains there because you cannot help it. She remains there because she is your wife!"

These words caused the concealed Mrs. Rixley to start so vehemently, that had she been less completely out of sight of those who were passing along the path above, the movement must have betrayed her. It was not, however, the purport of what was said which caused this emotion, but the sound of the voice which spoke it—a voice so perfectly

familiar, and well known that she felt it impossible she could be mistaken as to the person to whom it belonged, and yet a second thought told her that mistaken she must be, for how was it possible for her to believe that this "Almeria," so earnestly assured that she was the only one for whom her husband felt any real attachment, was Sarah Lambert, her nursemaid?

It was not very wonderful, perhaps, that her curiosity to ascertain the real truth upon this point was too pungent to permit her submitting to the cautious restraint which she had hitherto imposed upon herself, and she was in the very act of stepping forward from beneath the overhanging bushes which concealed her, when the loud voice of her husband, immediately above the spot where she stood, showed her that instead of walking forward as she supposed they had done, they were standing still within about four feet of the top of her head. She made this discovery however in time to arrest the imprudent movement she was going to make, and it was probably fortunate that she did so, for the tone of her husband's voice as he replied to

the fair "Almeria" by no means indicated any very gentle mood.

"Again, I tell you, that you are an idiot!" he exclaimed. "Yet it is I who am an idiot," he added, "for believing that you mean what you say. You know better, Almeria! you know as well as I do that if she were ten times my wife, I would manage to get quit of her if she troubled me. But she does not trouble me. On the contrary, her remaining to all intents and purposes my very contented and obedient wife, and your very unobservant and contented mistress, makes her invaluable to us both! Moreover she teaches the children well, and it costs me nothing. Moreover she keeps the house well, which is very convenient. Moreover every girl in the parish might appear a beauty in my eyes without her ever finding it out, or caring a rush about it if she did, and that too is very convenient. And very convenient would it be for all of us, if you had common sense enough to follow her example in this particular."

"It shall be my study to do so," replied the deep-toned and impressive voice of

Almeria, alias Sarah. "I ought to be able to do it," she added, "for I know two receipts for it. The one is that I should cease to love you. The other, that I should leave your house, and hide myself where you should never see me more."

"And if you ever attempt to achieve either the one or the other," replied Mr. Rixley, "I swear by all that is sacred, that I will murder you first, and myself afterwards! Beware of me, Almeria! I am not one who can be safely trifled with! You pride yourself upon your strength of mind, and firmness of character. And I have listened to your boastings till I believed you to be all that you seemed to believe yourself, and have almost worshipped you accordingly. And have you not ruled me, and led me, as if I had been your slave, instead of your master? Do you not know for, and by whose pleasure it is that these two children, for whom I do not care a rush, are kept here in high style and state, instead of being sent off to some cheap school, where I should never hear their voices again? Have I not told you a thousand times over, that I hate children? And have I not given up my

own will in this, in order to gratify yours? Why do you seem to shudder thus as you hang upon me, Almeria? Perhaps you think me a monster because I love them not? Ungrateful woman! If I love them not, it is because they are not yours! It is hateful to me to remember that the puling girl of my puling wife must inherit all I possess, except forsooth what I may be pleased to leave by will to your hopeful darling the boy, who is the very image of his vulgar mother, and, to my fancy, the most disagreeable brat I ever encountered in my life!"

"Take your arm from my waist, George Rixley! I will sit here no longer! The night wind from the ocean chills my limbs . . . and your words chill my soul! Let me go, I say. I will sit here no longer."

These words, uttered in the clear voice of her stately nurse gave the first intimation to her greatly embarrassed mistress that the pair from whom it was so important that she should remain concealed, were not, as she had imagined, pausing in their walk, but actually seated, almost close to her.

She positively feared to breathe, lest her

hiding place should be discovered thereby, and so great was her terror of the consequences which might follow such a discovery, that had not her husband obeyed the mandate of his mistress, and moved on, it is highly probable that his unfortunate wife might have betrayed herself by falling insensible upon the spot where she stood, and thereby calling their attention to her.

But she immediately heard him reply, in accents of tenderness such as she remembered to have heard in years long past, "Chilled, dearest! come then! and come quickly! Why have you let me detain you so long!"

And then she heard no more, save their retreating footsteps towards the Warren House.

The effect of this most unexpected discovery upon Mrs. Rixley was as painful—fully as painful—as if she had loved her husband, though the pain was of a very different kind. She found herself in the position which is, perhaps, of all others, the most painful to a conscientious mind, that is to say, she knew not what she *ought* to do, for she knew not, among many con-

flicting feelings, which were the most purely dictated by her duty, and an uncompromising sense of what was right.

There was something terribly repugnant to her delicacy in continuing to associate with the woman who called herself Sarah Lambert, on the same terms of well-satisfied and approving esteem as formerly. This course would not only be repugnant to her conscience, but would moreover require a degree of constant self-command, and even of hypocrisy, which she did not believe she had the power of practising. Yet, on the other hand, how could she venture to risk her own safety, and, what was far dearer still, the safety of the children, by proclaiming her knowledge of the infamous position which their nurse held in the house? It had been made clearly evident to her, by the direct avowal of her husband, that these unfortunate children owed the asylum granted them in the house of their father to the influence of this woman, and if she permitted her own feelings to rob them of it, what had she to give them in its stead?

Through the long hours of the dreadful

night which followed this discovery, the unhappy Mrs. Rixley never closed her eyes in sleep, nor even for a moment ceased to meditate with the most intense anxiety on the miserable position in which she found herself involved. The consequence of this feverish watchfulness, and the miserable uncertainty of purpose which ceased not to torment her during every hour it lasted, proved too much for her strength both of body and mind, and when Sarah Lambert as usual entered her room with the little Helen on the following morning, she found her in a raging fever, and perfectly delirious.

The violence, and the suddenness of this seizure, puzzled the worthy Mr. Foster greatly. But it was in vain that he questioned Sarah as to the manner in which she had spent the preceding day. Sarah knew nothing of her having taken a late evening walk; and when cautiously questioned by Mr. Foster as to the possibility of her having been startled, or in any way agitated by the unexpected return of Mr. Rixley, she gave a very satisfactory reply in the negative, assuring the apothecary, that to her certain

knowledge, her mistress had gone to bed, not only without having seen her master, but also without having been made aware of his return, as she herself, as well as all the other servants, very distinctly declared that they had neither seen, nor spoken to her after the return of Mr. Rixley, stating, moreover, that to the best of their knowledge and belief, she had retired to rest before his return, which was not till a late hour in the evening.

This illness, though it was both violent, and lingering, did not prove fatal; but the unfortunate Mrs. Rixley never fully recovered her health, or spirits. To decide upon a difficult, and very doubtful question without any counsellor to assist the judgment, must ever be a painful and arduous task, and sad indeed were the long and dreary hours devoted by the suffering invalid to the question of whether it were best, and wisest, to run all hazards, and insist upon the dismissal of her husband's mistress from the office of constant attendant upon herself and the children, or to suffer things to continue as they were, and

endeavour to forget all she had seen and heard.

That she at length decided upon this latter course might perhaps have been partly owing to the conduct of Sarah Lambert during her long illness. Had she been her sister, instead of her rival, she could not have shown more devoted attention, or more unwearied care; and when, upon at length leaving her room, and resuming by degrees the task of instructing the children, she discovered that the strangely mysterious "Almeria" had, notwithstanding all her attendance upon herself, contrived to supply her place with them, she felt no doubt that she "might have better spared a better" person.

The result, therefore, of all poor Mrs. Rixley's deep meditations was, that everything, excepting the state of her own health and spirits, remained in the same state as before her illness; but she never completely recovered from the effects of the shock she had received, and within two years after her eventful moonlight ramble she died, leaving her only child and its almost equally dear little brother, with no human being to love

and cherish them, save the guilty woman whose disgraceful connexion with their father rendered her pretty nearly the last person in the world, to whose care they ought to have been confided.

CHAPTER III.

“DEAR dear Sarah! Pray do not tell me that I must not go in the boat with papa!” cried the eager William, who, notwithstanding his fifteen years, and his almost manly stature, was still wonderfully obedient to command, at least when the command was spoken by the omnipotent Sarah Lambert, omnipotent alike from her absolute and uncontrolled power in his father’s house, and from his own grateful and devoted affection to her. Nor was this devoted affection more than she deserved, both from him and his sister also, for everything like pleasure or even comfort, which they either of them enjoyed was owing to her influence, to her exertions, to her steadfast purpose, and to her steadfast will.

The reader must content himself with being told that several years have worn themselves away between the conclusion of the last chapter, and the beginning of the present one, and great and important changes had taken place in the apparent situation of Mr. Rixley during this interval.

For the first year or two after the death of his wife, his establishment at the Warren House underwent but little change. His intercourse with his neighbours, indeed, which had never been very frequent, had now nearly ceased altogether, although he was much less absent from the neighbourhood, than he had been during the lifetime of his wife.

But this falling off of neighbourly intercourse was not very extraordinary, for his young daughter had still too much the appearance of a mere child to be visited, except by friends as intimate and as warmly interested for her as the young Fosters, and he was himself much too unpopular to be sought, and much too unsociable to seek anything approaching to friendly intercourse with anybody.

But during this first year or two his two children had enjoyed the advantage of receiving lessons from the curate of Crumpton, who, by the recommendation of Mr. Foster, and the influence of "Almeria," was permitted to attend them for three or four hours every morning.

No person could be more capable of advancing the education of these sadly-placed children than was this good Mr. Bolton. He was an excellent scholar, according to the English acceptation of the phrase, and, moreover, as it happened, he was an excellent French scholar too.

He was still almost a young man, though the father of a large family; and though his object in accepting the moderate stipend offered for the hours he thus devoted to the Warren House was to obtain a greatly-needed increase to his small income, he soon found himself so much interested both for the boy and girl, that his friendship became as valuable as his instruction.

When Sarah Lambert first learnt that the curate of Crumpton was anxious to find pupils, she made one of those resolute attacks

upon her "*master*," which seldom altogether failed of success, in order that William might have the benefit of instruction thus fortunately within his reach; for his father had long ago declared that *nothing* should induce him to place the boy at school; the final answer which he had given to her remonstrances on this subject being, that he had rather be hung, drawn, and quartered, than submit to having his affairs, and his conduct, examined into and judgment passed upon him, by masters and ushers, mistresses and maids, through all the successive schools and academies, which her silly fondness for him might lead her to recommend.

"There is at least one holy axiom, Almeria," said he, "that I have never lost sight of through life,—'*let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth*,' and you, of all the world, should be the last to quarrel with my respect for it, for it has saved you from much that you would not very patiently have endured!"

He spoke truly—and she knew it. He spoke resolutely too; and when she was aware that he did so, the contest ended, for Almeria

loved not to speak idle words. And thus it was that his son William had completed his fifteenth year, and his daughter Helen her twelfth, without receiving any more finished education than it had been in the power of his wife and the curate to give them.

But as both the children were quick, intelligent, and docile, they were considerably better informed on many subjects, and in all respects greatly more intelligent, than those who had apparently enjoyed much greater intellectual advantages. But a very sudden alteration now took place in Mr. Rixley's manner of living: and though he gave no reason for it, not even to Sarah Lambert, it could scarcely be doubted that pecuniary misfortune must be the cause of it. But upon no occasion had he ever adhered so scrupulously to his system of secrecy as he did now. He gave Mrs. Lambert, as he now always called her, at least when there was any one present to hear him, very sudden, but very explicit, orders to dismiss every servant in the house, only permitting a woman in the village, who had formerly lived with him as cook, to do the work of the house as a day-

servant; adding, however, as he gave this permission, that it was highly probable that when Helen was a year or two older she would have to fill this place herself.

"But this," he added, "will depend upon circumstances. It is possible that I may never be obliged to place her in the situation that Rebecca Watkins holds now; but it is not only possible, but very probable, that I may, and if the necessity, or what I shall choose to consider as the necessity, comes, be very sure, Mrs. Lambert, that I shall not shrink from it."

He said this sternly, and resolutely; and Sarah Lambert felt at that moment (and it was the first time that she had ever felt it distinctly) that her influence with him was no longer so omnipotent as it had been.

If before this conviction reached her heart, a choice had been offered her between feeling it, or losing the power of feeling anything, by yielding herself instantly to sudden death, she would have chosen the latter. But no such choice was offered; and the pang that shot through her heart and brain at that moment might have won pity from any being of a

nature less flinty than that of the man who inflicted it.

At the time this narrative actually begins, however, this *necessity* had evidently not arrived; for though everything approaching to the appearance of a gentleman's establishment had been broken up, the footman, cook, housemaid, and regular gardener dismissed, and the reverend tutor paid off, with a formal written notification that his attendance upon the young people would be no longer required, yet still the daily attendance of the "maid of all work" was permitted; and no tasks were as yet assigned to the delicate Helen but such as were apportioned by Sarah Lambert, and these, most assuredly, were no heavier than might have been enjoined to an accomplished young princess of the blood royal, whose education was not yet completed.

Although nothing in the least degree approaching parental love was now, or indeed ever had been, demonstrated by Mr. Rixley towards either of his children, his conduct towards them was by no means equal. To the boy he was always either brutally severe,

or else so negligent as to make it almost doubtful whether he had not forgotten his existence altogether.

To the girl also, he was frequently very sullenly cross, but neither absolutely brutal, nor forgetful; for it frequently happened that after one of his long absences from the Warren House, which since the dismissal of his servants had again become both long and frequent, he would desire that she might be brought to him: and when she came, he looked at her much as he might have done at a horse that he was about either to buy or to sell. Upon these occasions Sarah Lambert never failed to bring forward the young William also, secretly flattering herself that his handsome person, bright intelligence, and frank, joyous manner must, in time, win the heart even of his unnatural father.

And even after she had given up this hope, she still persevered in her system of making William accompany her to the parlour when commanded to bring Helen. For some time the only notice, which this sort of enforced entry produced, was a surly frown,

and to this the light-hearted lad was so accustomed that he did not greatly heed it; but it sank deep into the heart of Sarah Lambert—so deep, that the passionate love she had once felt for Rixley was so rapidly growing into hatred, that nothing prevented her leaving him but the idea that his children would suffer more than he would by her loss.

Of this quiet, but most complete change in her feelings towards him, Mr. Rixley was completely unconscious. He had known, only too well, how successful his influence over her had been in overcoming and stifling all her early principles, and all her purest feelings: and he triumphed in the consciousness of having perverted and subdued a mind so powerful, and a heart so warm.

But, although he knew much, he did not know all the peculiarities of her character, nor was he aware how far the same resolute firmness of temper which had led her to conquer every obstacle, and crush every virtuous feeling, in order to give herself to him, might lead her in some new direction, upon her discovering that she was no

longer of the same importance to him as formerly.

He did, however, perceive that she was very obstinately resolute in her determination of bringing the son of the pretended Mrs. Rixley as often into his imperial presence, as the daughter of the real one: and this provoked him greatly; for he not only had given to this, his sole legitimate child, the privilege of being christened and registered at the parish church, but he had actually made his will, and left her everything he possessed.

This last act, indeed, was not performed without the pleasant consciousness that it would be annulled if he should chance to marry a second time, and become the father of a legitimate son.

In truth his only reason for making this will at all, was because he was very particularly anxious to guard against the possibility of his brother's inheriting, as heir-at-law, whatever property he possessed.

Mr. Rixley was a great hater; he certainly might have very fairly been said to hate many persons with an intensity that might have

secured to him the admiration of the great moralist himself; but all his other hatreds were but minor passions in comparison of that which he cherished against his brother; the original cause of this master passion may be explained hereafter, but it had nothing to do with the events which I have at present to relate.

The having made this will, however, whatever the motive of his doing it, had given his daughter considerable importance in his eyes, and it was this feeling which caused him to summon her to his presence in the manner above mentioned.

As to the poor boy, he had been from the hour of his birth so little cared for, or indeed thought of, by his father, that nothing but Sarah Lambert's ill-judged pertinacity would have been likely to have made him of sufficient importance to be the object of positive dislike. Having been repeatedly told by those who had given the boy all the instruction he had received that he was more than commonly rapid in learning all that they attempted to teach him, Mr. Rixley conceived the bright idea of procuring for him the place of usher at the grammar-school of a neigh-

bouring town, and it was with this view that he still continued to allow the visits of Mr. Bolton, the curate, in the capacity of a tutor.

But he became so irritated by the observation of the once omnipotent Almeria, upon his want of affection for the boy, in thus condemning him to a sedentary occupation in a close school-room, which his active temperament would, she said, so assuredly make peculiarly painful to him, that he suddenly changed his purpose, and protested with an oath—both oath and protestation being addressed to the pale and gloomy-looking Almeria—that the boy should cost him no more for lessons, but should learn to be a sailor.

“Perhaps,” he added, with a sneer, “that trade may suit his *temperament* better: and, at any rate, I can teach it myself, which will suit my present system of economy greatly better than paying Mr. Bolton.”

That Mr. Rixley was in earnest in saying this, was in some degree proved, by three days passing away without their seeing the good curate; but during that interval no further

mention had been made of the new project of education.

On the fourth, however, upon Sarah's taking the two children into the parlour, the salutation of their father was not, as usual, addressed to Helen, but to the boy.

"William!" he said, "what should you say if instead of having parson Bolton to make you study Latin and Greek, I were to take you in hand, and make a sailor of you?"

"I should say, papa, that I liked it very much indeed! And I would not let Helen get before me in Latin, either, for I would sit up at night to write my exercises," was the boy's reply.

"Come along then!" returned his father, with a greater approach to good humour in his voice than poor William had ever heard from him before.

"Won't it be nice for me, Sarah?" said the boy, turning to the constant friend who he felt sure would rejoice with his rejoicing.

But in this he was disappointed, for Sarah Lambert knit her dark brows, and said, "No, William! I do not choose that you should go on the sea in such weather as this. It is

blowing fearfully! It will be a storm. I will not let you go, William."

And then it was that the boy said, "Dear, dear Sarah! Pray do not tell me that I must not go in the boat with papa!"

CHAPTER IV.

MR. RIXLEY had been so long accustomed to submit himself in many things to the influence of Sarah Lambert, at least while under the immediate influence of her commanding, or her beseeching eyes, that he heard this appeal, and saw the arbitrary shake of the head which rejected it, without testifying either surprise or anger. Nevertheless, after the interval of a moment, he turned suddenly towards her, and fixed not exactly an angry, but very decidedly an inquisitive glance upon her countenance.

Her pale cheek was for a moment crimsoned, and, contrary to the usual result of an enquiring look from the man who fancied himself her master, she did not return his

glance, but fixed her eyes upon a flower that she held in her hand.

At that moment they mutually misunderstood each other most completely. Mr. Rixley fancied that she feared having offended him by the blunt wilfulness with which she had opposed his proposal to the boy, and *she* thought that he had detected the dark feeling of suspicion with which she had heard him propose to take his young son with him upon the sea in weather which none but a practical sailor could have encountered without certain suffering, and probable danger.

They were both mistaken, however; for Sarah Lambert neither feared, nor heeded, the possibility of his being offended by her refusal, nor did *he* guess how dark was the suspicion which had flashed upon her mind upon hearing his proposal to the boy.

He looked at her frowningly, nevertheless; but not as he would have looked had he suspected the truth; and said, rudely enough, "How can you be such an idiot, Sarah Lambert! Because it pleases you to stand there looking at a rose, or a lily, or whatever

it is you are holding there so daintily, you want to make this great huge giant of a boy do the same. I suppose you are giving him lessons in needlework? How does he get on with his stitching, Mrs. Lambert?"

"No, papa! no! Sarah does not want to make a coward of me! Don't be angry with her because she loves me! Only tell her that there is no danger, and then she will like my going almost as much as I shall like it myself."

"Very well, sir, I will obey you," replied his father. And then turning towards her with what he intended for a smile, but which she read aright as a sneer, he added, "I beg to assure you, Mrs. Lambert, that there is no chance whatever of your young darling's being exposed to any danger, and I therefore flatter myself that you will be so obliging as to let him go."

"Then let us all go!" said Sarah Lambert, with an air of great animation, "I am no great coward myself, and as to the gentle-looking Miss Helen, I can assure you, sir, that she is likely to turn out a perfect heroine. There is no such feeling as fear

in her nature ! You will like to go in the boat, my dear, will you not ? ”

“ I should like to go anywhere with you, Sarah,” replied Helen, creeping lovingly to her side, and passing her arm under that of her faithful attendant and dearly beloved friend.

“ Intriguing sorceress ! ” muttered Mr. Rixley between his teeth, but in a tone so low that the children heard it not, though Sarah Lambert did, for he took care to be close to her ear as he uttered the words.

She started, but immediately recovering her self-possession, she said, addressing them both, but without paying the least attention to their father, who nevertheless stood by in silence, as if expecting her final commands, “ No ! we will neither of us go. This weather is not fit for an excursion on the water. Hush ! Do you not hear the raging wind. It is not right for us to leave the house in such weather, and therefore we will not do it.”

Both the boy and girl did as she bade them do. They did listen to the wind, and became so seasonably aware of its violence,

that they signified their conviction, like reasonable beings as they were, that "they thought it would perhaps be better to stay at home."

"Curse her!" muttered Mr. Rixley in a deep whisper.

"What great events from trivial causes spring!"

Unimportant as this scene appears in the repetition, it was productive of very important results to the parties engaged in it.

The rage of Mr. Rixley appeared for a moment to be perfectly uncontrollable. He stamped with his feet, he clenched his fists till his nails lacerated the palms of his hands, and again he uttered curses both deep and loud against HER, for so only was the object of his wrath designated. "Leave the room," he said, distinctly addressing the two children, "I wish to speak to Mrs. Lambert on business."

Sarah Lambert, on hearing these words, released the hand of Helen, which was fast locked in hers, bent down and kissed her forehead, and said, in a very gentle and composed voice, "Go, my dear;—go, both of

you into the school-room. I will come to you almost directly."

Helen immediately prepared to obey her by walking towards the door, but having reached it paused for a moment to wait for her brother. But the obedience of the boy was less prompt; he remained stationary, and as it were rooted to the spot where for the first time he heard the sound of his father's harsh voice raised to unmitigated violence, and uttering curses against HER whom he loved himself with all the gratitude and all the fondness of his warm enthusiastic nature.

His father turned towards him with an uplifted arm. "Go, William!" said Sarah Lambert, very quietly, but fixing her eyes upon him with a look that had more of entreaty than command in it; and he obeyed her instantly.

To the school-room they both went, William's arm round the waist of his sister, and her head resting against his shoulder as they walked.

On entering the room he placed her in the cushioned chair which had been her mother's

constant seat, and having closed the door placed himself before her, and remained for a moment silently looking in her pale face.

"Helen!" he said at length, "I do not wish to have any secrets from you, and I do not choose that you should think me any better than I am. You are my sister, you know, because the same man is your father and my father, and as we have neither of us any other brothers or sisters, we ought not to live like strangers together, the one not knowing what is passing in the heart of the other. And you don't know yet, Helen, what is the greatest and strongest feeling in my heart."

"Yes, I do, William!" replied the little girl, affectionately, "your love for me, and for Sarah Lambert is the greatest and strongest feeling."

"No, Helen, it is not," he replied gloomily, and sternly. "You are mistaken, you are deceived in me, and that is exactly the reason why I am now determined to open my heart to you. I will not let you love me upon the strength of a mistake and a blunder, and from believing what is no better than a lie.

I certainly do love you, and Sarah, both, dearly, dearly! But you have got a very mistaken idea of me, Helen, if you think *that* sweet gentle feeling is the strongest feeling of my heart. Hear the truth at once, and then all the love you may be able to feel for me afterwards I shall cherish and delight in, because it will be fairly my own, without cheating; but first listen to me and believe what I say—the greatest and strongest feeling of my heart is *hatred of my father!* Yes, Helen, hatred of your father, and my father.”

“That sounds very shocking, William!” replied the poor girl, looking frightened, but at the same moment stretching out her arms to embrace him.

“Then you think you can love me still?” said he, kneeling down before her, and fondly returning the kiss she impressed upon his forehead. “How very glad I am that I have told you the truth, Helen! I don’t feel now as if I were so very wicked, and the reason for that is, that I am no longer conscious of deceiving you, and of appearing better than I really am.”

Having said this he sprang upon his feet, and strode with a hurried step up and down the room.

"What do you think he is saying to her all this time, Helen?" he exclaimed, after continuing his walk in silence for a minute or two. "I suppose you know who he meant by HER? When he uttered in that horrid voice the words 'curse her,' you understand that he meant to curse Sarah Lambert?"

Helen did not speak, but she bent her head in reply in a way which made her brother fully understand that she agreed with him in his interpretation.

"HER, Helen!" he repeated — "HER! Sarah Lambert! The being who has watched over his dying wife, and the motherless children she left, more like an angel than a woman! It was three years ago and more that your dear mother died, Helen, and you were a very little girl; too little perhaps to remember much about it now; but I remember it all! I remember how day after day, and night after night, she would sit watching by your dear pale

mother's bed, and only steal away from time to time just to see that you and I wanted for nothing. Ay, and she was very kind to him too, ungrateful tyrant as he is. I have seen her gentle ways with him a thousand times, when he has been as sullen as a bear to her in return! Yet now he curses her!—Helen, I hate him.”

“Do not say so any more, William—not even to yourself,” replied the little girl, looking pale with terror, “I am sure it must be very wicked to say so, or I should not feel so frightened at hearing it. Promise me that you will not say it again,” she added, coaxingly, and repeating her caress.

“There is no occasion that I should say it any more,” he replied, springing upon his feet, while the heavy gloom which had seemed to settle on his young brow vanished completely. I have spoken the truth, and you are no more likely to forget it than I am. I wanted you to know the truth, Helen, and you do know it, and yet you love me still. I feel now as if I did not much care for anything—nor will I care for anything, as long as he does not drive Sarah

away from us. But she shan't stay to be ill-used. He had better not use her ill, Helen! He had better not! I do assure you it would be very dangerous, for I hate him already quite enough: and if he makes me hate him more by ill-treating her, I think I should kill him—I do, indeed! But don't look so frightened, child. Good gracious, how pale you are! How can you be such a fool, Helen? Do you think I am going really to kill him this very minute?"

"I wish you would not talk in such a very dreadful way, William!" said the poor girl, actually trembling from head to foot. "If you really love me, you never will talk to me in such a very shocking way again. What do you think Sarah would say, if she could hear you?"

"Why, I think it is very likely, my dear, that she would say just as you do, that it was very wrong to talk about such shocking things as killing. But I can tell you, Helen, what she would *not* do. She would not turn as white as a sheet, lips and all, as you have done.—There is no silly girl-like weakness in Sarah Lambert! If she told the real

truth like me, she would be sure to say, that if a wicked man was shot, it would be no more than he deserved. But I think it is very likely she would not say it, though she might think it, for fear, you know, that it might set me upon shooting him."

This was said with the gay boy's usual lightness of manner; but poor little Helen was in no humour to laugh at it. Her father's violent language had frightened her, and her brother's wild talk frightened her again; but this was not all, for she was frightened also, because she thought that Sarah stayed a great deal too long in the parlour, considering what a very bad humour her father was in: and, perhaps, she was right.

CHAPTER V.

MR. RIXLEY remained silent for a minute or two after his children had left the room, as if listening to the sound of their retreating footsteps; and then he said in a voice so low as to be almost a whisper, "Sit down, Mrs. Lambert."

Had he cursed her again, and in the same fierce tone of angry violence as before, it would not, perhaps, have affected her so painfully as these civil words thus civilly spoken. It was the first time he had ever addressed her as "Mrs. Lambert," when they were quite alone, and it was also the first time that she had ever felt convinced in her inmost heart that he had ceased to love her.

Perhaps he was not altogether unmindful of the effect likely to be produced upon her by this change, and it might be that he felt more disposed to produce such an effect than to avoid it.

Be this as it may, he was instantly obeyed, which, heretofore, had not always been the case when he had addressed a command to her. It is probable that the young William was right, when he said that Sarah Lambert would not turn pale upon hearing him talk of shooting, and killing, yet her always pale cheek had become much paler now; but there was, moreover, a strong expression of resolute endurance in her eye, which, from its sternness, might have frightened the bold boy himself, had he seen it.

"It is high time that we should understand one another, Almeria;" said Mr. Rixley, as soon as they were both seated, "and depend upon it," he added, "that it will be as much for your advantage, as for mine, that we should do so."

These words, slowly and deliberately spoken, together with the act of seating themselves, which they did in two chairs

exactly opposite to each other, afforded the strongly-moved, but strongly-minded Sarah Lambert, quite time enough to decide upon the line of conduct she should adopt in the new position which she plainly saw opening before her.

Notwithstanding the many excellent and noble qualities with which Nature had endowed this unfortunate woman, the vehemence of her feelings, whether excited by what was evil, or by what was good, had hitherto for ever overpowered the dictates of her judgment, but it was so no longer with her. She was at that moment quite as certain as if the words had been already spoken, that it was the purpose of her master to dismiss her, of her lover to declare that she had outlived his liking, and of the man, for whose sake she had sacrificed all that made life precious, to inform her that for the future their paths must be as widely apart as possible.

All this she felt, and knew, as if by inspiration; but by the time her now haughty-looking master had placed himself in his chair, she was perfectly prepared for it all.

"We are neither of us fools, Mrs. Lambert," said Mr. Rixley, cutting his nails as he spoke, with a penknife, which he had in his hand, "we are neither of us fools, and therefore whatever business we may have to settle is not likely to detain us long. Though you do not choose to let your nursling, master William, hazard his precious safety by taking a sail with me, I happen to think the day exactly fitted for it, and I shall be off directly; so you must excuse the want of ceremony, if I settle the business I have to do rather abruptly. How long is it, Mrs. Lambert, since you and I began making love?"

Many great and important acts have been performed that demanded less strength of mind for their achievement than was required to enable "*Mrs. Lambert*" to reply to this question in the manner she did.

"A very long time, Mr. Rixley! There is no denying that," she said, in an accent which betrayed no more emotion than if she had been discussing the length of time it had cost her to hem his last dozen of pocket handkerchiefs; "and I own to you," she

added, "that I am well pleased at your giving me an opportunity of speaking to you on the subject of my situation in your family. I know I am useful in the house, and I know I am useful to the children; and I think it would be a great folly in you to send me away, merely because my love-making days are over. You do me no more than justice in saying I am not a fool; but a fool I must be, if I felt it necessary to give up my situation as your servant, because we have both of us grown tired of love-making."

"I am sure I don't want to send you away, Mrs. Lambert, if you can really be contented to stay as a servant, and nothing else; but nothing else you ever can be again, I promise you. The folly has lasted too long already, and the consequence is, that you decidedly give yourself very unwarrantable airs with me. What the devil was it to you, Mrs. Sarah Lambert, whether that long-legged scamp of a boy that you have been dandling for the last dozen years got a ducking or not? Much it would have hurt him! I tell you fairly I don't like

such a dictatorial style from you any longer. It is high time it should be left off."

"Dear me, sir!" replied the once splendid and omnipotent Almeria, in an accent, and with an attitude in perfect accordance with her situation as a long-trusted and faithful attendant upon the children, "I should have thought that you had seen enough of women, and children, to know that a nursling is dearer to the nurse than anything else in the whole world, that is to say, of course, after her love-making days are over. But if you will let me stay on, sir, as nursery governess and housekeeper, I will do my duty by the children, and never trouble you by reminding you of the days that are past and gone. And I am sure, sir, if you take another to manage your housekeeping, you won't find it answer."

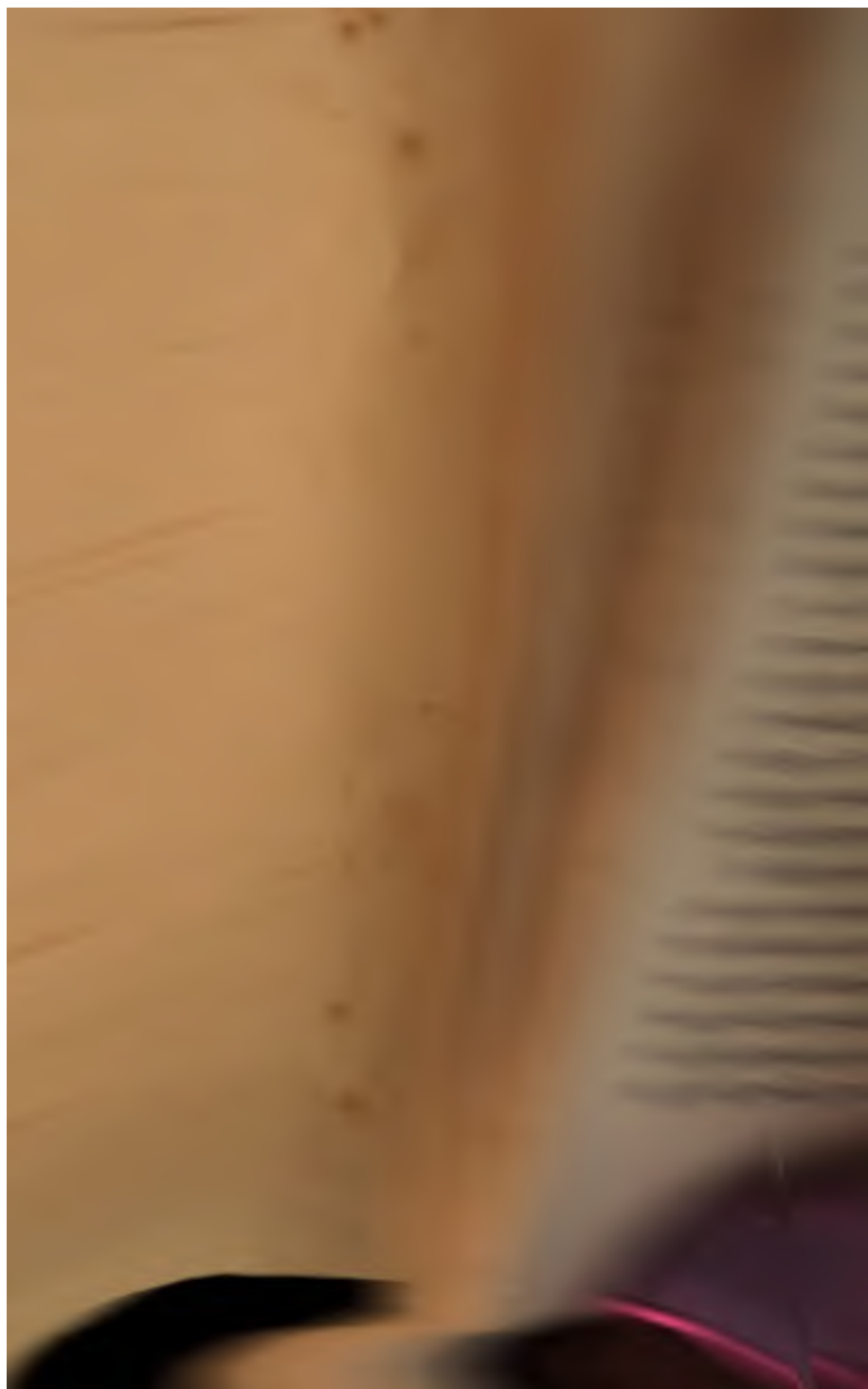
Mr. Rixley looked at her with a suspicious glance for a moment, as if he did not quite know whether she was in earnest; but there was a quiet business-like composure in her manner which re-assured him; and, moreover, he had recourse to a little rapid mental logic, which speedily convinced him that

there was nothing at all extraordinary in her being willing to continue to remain in the house upon the terms she herself proposed.

"Why should I suspect her of being more pigeon-like, and constant, than I am myself?" thought he. "She is much too clever a creature, and that I ought to know by this time, to want to go on for everlasting, as if there was no such thing as growing old. And it is hard to say what I could do without her, either as to the housekeeping, or the children. I had better take her at her word, and try her, at any rate. It will be easy enough to get rid of her afterwards, if I find she plagues me."

These wise thoughts passed rapidly through his brain, and were acted upon immediately.

"There is a great deal of truth in what you say, Mrs. Lambert," he replied, after the meditative silence of a minute or two: "I certainly do think that it would be very great folly for me to send off such a useful person as you are, for no worse fault than making a fuss about the great boy that you



1784

11. *Microtus* sp.
found in the soil of
the field near the house

12. *Microtus* sp.

13. *Microtus* sp.

14. *Microtus* sp.

15. *Microtus* sp.

16. *Microtus* sp.

17. *Microtus* sp.

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35. *Microtus* sp.

body, as to burst into a convulsive fit of weeping. The tears she shed were scalding hard-wrung tears, but they were beneficial to her. Had she not wept, she might have become delirious.

CHAPTER VI.

WHY, or wherefore, it might be difficult to tell, but it is certainly a fact that the propensity to different passions differs as much in different human beings as their form and features. A keen-eyed, and nice-fingered phrenologist might point out with great accuracy the effects of this variety of temperament as manifested by the form of the head within which the agents of these various passions are at work ; but this only shows the effect of their greater or less activity, and not the cause of it. Why it was that the woman, who is best known to the reader as Sarah Lambert, though frequently under the influence of very powerful passion, was in no degree subject to *jealousy*, I cannot tell ; such however was the fact.

Mr. Foster, the apothecary of Crumpton, was perfectly correct in his judgment, when he stated it as his belief that Sarah Lambert was of Greek origin. Her mother was a Greek, and had come to this country as the wife of a certain Thomas Lambert, the comely captain of a merchantman, who had fallen in love with her at Corfu, and married her there, greatly to the scandal and displeasure of her family, who considered their handsome but portionless daughter as having greatly degraded herself by the connexion.

The comely captain, however, did not very long survive his nuptials, but lived long enough to bring his handsome wife to his native town, which was Falmouth, where he established her in a very comfortable well-furnished little mansion; but the worthy man died when his daughter Almeria was only five years old, leaving her and her mother with little or nothing to maintain them, save the rent of their pretty house, which was let as furnished lodgings, the widow and her child contenting themselves with the little back parlour, and the kitchen below it.

Their means of living, however, were occasionally increased by the handsome widow Lambert's condescending to cook for, and wait upon such single gentlemen as came to lodge with her, and could afford to pay her for doing so.

But notwithstanding this condescension on her part, she did not neglect her little girl, and gave her quite as much, or rather more education, than was necessary for her station.

This unfortunate girl was very handsome, and her mother was very proud of her beauty, and long persuaded herself that it was absolutely impossible that so beautiful a girl who could play music, and speak French, could fail of getting a husband rich enough to keep her like a lady; and to take them both back to their own bright mother country with wealth and grandeur enough to make all their kindred there both proud and happy to receive them.

And if admiring lovers had been all that was necessary to realize this dream, poor Mrs. Lambert would only have awakened from it to welcome the reality. Neither were

there wanting several eligible proposals of marriage to the beautiful Almeria; but her obstinate refusal to accept any of them, though long tolerated by her admiring mother as a prudent expectation of something better still, at length became a source of perpetual struggle between the mother and daughter. The tempers of both were violent, and as year after year passed on, the continued strife between them became so ceaseless, and habitual, that the lives of both were embittered by it.

Yet still the beauty of Almeria continued as striking as ever, and again and again her hand was sought for in marriage by men whom her mother approved, but to none of whom she could be persuaded to listen. It was in vain, that Mrs. Lambert—whose temper was become as gloomy, as it was violent—it was in vain that she explained the deficiency of their little income to supply their daily wants, and the daily dress of her admired daughter, for the only answer she could obtain was the sturdy repetition of the often pleaded defence, “Mother, I do not love him!”

“Nor will you ever love any man! It is

not in your nature to love," was the answer she had more than once received from her angry parent. But Almeria herself was of a different opinion, and rather felt conscious that it was because she could love, and love passionately, that she shrunk with such deep abhorrence from the idea of giving herself to one whom she loved not.

It is scarcely possible to imagine a more dangerous process for such a character as hers, than that to which she was thus perpetually exposed. She felt in her very heart of hearts that she was right, and not wrong—virtuous, and not vicious—in refusing to become the wife of any man she could not love; yet notwithstanding the truth and purity of this theory, it was, by the unfortunate concurrence of the circumstances around her, likely to lead her to the reverse of all that was virtuous in principle, and right in practice.

Matters were in their very worst state between herself and her mother; money was scarce, and debts abundant; and moreover, a wealthy merchant, who offered to provide for her mother, as well as to make a handsome

settlement on herself, was earnestly beseeching her to marry him, when a yachting excursion, in which he was engaged, brought Mr. Rixley to Falmouth.

The purpose of the party, with whom he was engaged, was to make a long rambling cruise, but the wind fell to a dead calm when they were off Falmouth, and they came on shore to escape the bore of close quarters, and useless sea-room.

The rest is soon told, and the less it is dwelt upon, the better. Mr. Rixley appeared to Almeria the *beau ideal* of all she had been looking for in a lover; and, to say the truth, her home had become so miserable, that even had she admired him less, he might have succeeded in winning her heart. But as it was, all the indifference of her past life seemed like a well-preserved magazine of gas, that blazed into a brightness proportioned to its former darkness the moment that the flame had reached it.

Mr. Rixley, with all his ardour and all his impassioned vehemence, was not a man capable of returning, or of comprehending such a love as that which Almeria Lambert

bore him. But he certainly thought her by far the handsomest woman he had ever seen, nor was he at all insensible of the pleasure of being passionately beloved for himself, and himself alone. He knew perfectly well that his wife neither did, nor ever had loved him, nor had he ever had much faith in the disinterested attachment of poor William's mother, though in point of genuine attachment she might perhaps have held the middle place between the passionate love of Almeria, and the something more than mere unimpassioned indifference which was felt for him by his wife.

Certain it is, however, that coarse and unrefined as had ever been every attachment he had hitherto felt, and totally incapable as he was of comprehending the powerful character of the unfortunate Almeria, or of appreciating the strength of her mind, or even her devoted attachment to himself, he was nevertheless fully aware that he was loved now, as he had never been loved before ; and being conscious, moreover, that he was no longer in the flower of his youth, his vanity was as much touched as his affection, and he was desperately de-

terminated not to lose the gratification of so splendid a conquest.

The manner in which he brought her into his house has been already stated, as well as the position she held there. Although he was infinitely more capable of awakening all that was evil in the unfortunate woman's character, than of appreciating what was good, he was far from being insensible to the gratification of being her idol as well as her master; and though his dissolute manner of life led him during the years which followed into many passing intrigues, it could scarcely be said that she ever had a rival. Had she been as prone to jealousy however, as she decidedly was the reverse, it is possible that the case might have been different; as it was, she felt herself as undoubtedly certain of his continued love for her, as of her own unvarying love for him.

It is certain, indeed, that not all this undoubting confidence in his attachment either did, or could prevent her being a very miserable woman. She had no natural propensity to hypocrisy in her, yet her whole life was a cheat, and the consciousness of

this galled her pride even more than it awakened her remorse. The certainty, however, that the man she adored, rather than loved, was an object not only of indifference, but dislike to his wife, was an endless and ceaseless source of consolation to her, and without it, as she often told herself, she would rather have died than lived.

Another source of consolation arose from a cause of precisely an opposite character, namely the strong sympathy which existed between her unfortunate mistress and herself in their feelings towards the children. She knew that here at least she was a blessing and a comfort to her, and the knowing this was a more constant support to her under the many miseries of her degraded position (although she guessed it not) than all her infatuated confidence in the attachment of her master.

It is a commonly received belief that love is blind, but there could not easily be found a stronger illustration of the truth of this, than the manner in which Almeria Lambert so long witnessed the hard indifference of Mr. Rixley towards his children, without feeling

her attachment to him lessened by it. He had told her that if the children had been hers, he should have loved them ; and she so implicitly believed the assertion that she only pitied, where she ought to have hated him.

As to her own attachment to them, which partook of the same characteristic devotedness and warmth of heart which so long sustained her love for their father, she accounted for it to herself, by remembering that the children were his.

In short from the hour in which she had first seen him, to that in which he had just left her in the manner I have described, she had been living as completely in a state of delusion respecting his character, his qualities, and his feelings, as if she had been held under the spell of an enchanter's wand.

Now, for the first time, she saw him such as he really was, and the doing so very nearly destroyed her.

The firmness of her own attachment had communicated a like firmness to her faith in him. She had never for a moment felt the sensation of jealousy, for this is a passion that for the most part owes its birth to suspicion,

and suspicion was foreign to her nature : nor was it jealousy that tortured her now. Had she believed him to be still the same glorious being which her ignorance and her imagination combined had led her to paint him, and if so believing she had learnt that he no longer loved her, but loved another, the conviction, if it had really reached, might have really killed her . . . but it would not have cured her of her love. But now the frightful truth flashed upon her with the clearness, and almost with the rapidity of lightning, that she had been living under a delusion from the hour she had seen him first, till within a few short moments of the instant when she had seen him last.

The revulsion occasioned throughout her whole being by this discovery was fearfully violent, and its effects were fearfully lasting. To follow the course of all the terrible thoughts which chased each other through her throbbing brain, as the conviction of the delusion under which she had lived, settled itself as it were upon her very heart and soul, would be a futile attempt; and the sequel of my story will do more towards

making this vehement process understood, than the most laboured description of it. Yet even while crushed to the earth by the blow which had fallen upon her, the dauntless spirit of the unfortunate woman seemed to rise within her in defiance of the cold blooded contempt with which she had been treated.

But for a considerable time she felt as if her intellect was confused, and that although she had much to do, and that very strong measures were to be taken, she would have been about equally at a loss to say what her object was, or what the means by which she proposed to obtain it. By degrees, however, she became more collected, and more calm; one proof of which was that she resolutely determined to avoid taking any sudden resolution as to her future conduct.

“Could I,” thought she, “during the course of the coming night sleep but for one short hour, the puzzling confusion of thought which now besets me, would cease, and I should not decide one moment to do that which I should decide against doing the next.”

She rose from her bed, and for a few minutes indulged herself by standing bare-headed at her window, and receiving the fresh strong gale from the sea upon her forehead. And then she soliloquised again.

"I will first make a difficult, but not very important resolution," thought she; "if I have sufficient self-command to keep that, I may look forward with something like confidence in my own strength for the future."

And after a few minutes of consideration this first resolution took for its object the occupying the remainder of the passing day exactly as she would have done, had the most important catastrophe of her life not fallen upon her.

To achieve this, the first thing she had to do was to seek the children, and to speak to them as if she were still the same tranquil-minded and contented being they had ever known her. This might be somewhat difficult, for instead of tranquil-minded, her head was throbbing as if a set of fulling hammers were at work within it. Yet what was this, when compared to the task which was to follow after? For had she not to see, and

hear, and speak to, the man who for a dozen years had perseveringly deluded her into the belief that he had loved her, even as she had loved him? And as she remembered this, the thought of instant self-destruction flashed across her mind as an alternative offering most tempting relief.

It was surely more a Greek than an English feeling which followed, and which at once and for ever chased every idea of self-destruction from her mind.

“Destroy myself?” she muttered bitterly, “and so save the villain from all further pains and penalties from his infernal acts? No! By the God that made me, I swear that I will cherish my own life with all the tender caution of a coward keeping guard over his own safety, and all the wakeful watchfulness of a mother protecting a precious child. Yes, Rixley! I will live till I have taught thee to know that a wronged woman’s hate may be more difficult to conquer, than her love.”

From this moment Mrs. Lambert found no farther difficulty in sustaining the part she had assigned herself. In all respects,

save one, she was guided, as she had ever been, by the kindly feelings of a very affectionate heart. She could not feign to love William, and his sister Helen more dearly than she really did love them, therefore with them she had no change to make ; and as to the being before whom she was never again to appear, save as the thing she was not, how could the playing such a part be anything but joy and gladness to her ? Should she not deceive him ? Would not her every look and word be false ? And should she not taste all the sweetness of vengeance as she fooled him ? And might she not worm herself into the hidden mystery of his changed heart ? And might she not torture him then ?”

The smile was a very fearful one that sat upon her still handsome features, as she thus prepared herself for the task that lay before her ; it was not a false smile, however, but a very true one, inasmuch as it spoke a feeling of deep contentment from contemplating the work that lay before her, and with it a consciousness of the unshrinking strength which she felt within her, wherewith to accomplish it.

CHAPTER VII.

SHE found William and Helen very quietly seated in the school-room, the turbulent feelings of the boy soothed into forgetfulness of every thing painful by the clever device of Helen, who after suffering his first vehement burst of anger against his father's offensive words to the beloved Sarah to exhaust itself, had restored him easily to his usual happy state of mind by making him read the 'Lay of the Last Minstrel' to her as she sat at work.

Mrs. Lambert praised them both for being so well employed, and with such perfect composure of look and manner, as almost made them forget that anything had occurred to vex her.

I have now related all that I know respecting the unfortunate Almeria Lambert up to the moment at which the feeling, which, when she was innocent, had proved strong enough to overthrow all that she knew was right, had been converted, after many years of guilt, into another feeling quite strong enough to stifle that to which it owed its birth; but which, nevertheless, was not of the quality likely to lead either to fitting repentance or fitting atonement.

Yet still the character of the woman remained a mixed character; it was by no means wholly bad, for there was no selfishness in it: and there was still an immensity of that deep devotion to those whom she could still love, which redeems human nature from much that is contemptibly little, though it cannot save it from much that may be fearfully bad.

The day passed on, to all appearance much as former days had done; William prepared his exercises for the clergyman's evening visit. Helen had been ready for it before the scene in the parlour took place; and she now settled herself very steadily at the piano-

forte, in order to achieve a final and decisive victory over a difficult lesson.

The habit of Mr. Rixley was to dine alone when his mornings, or rather his whole days, were passed on the sea, and he did so now; his son and daughter, however, were ordered to come in with the dessert; and as no order of his was ever disobeyed, they appeared before him, although both of them would infinitely have preferred remaining to perform the very hardest tasks that the school-room could offer than partake with him the finest fruit that was ever spread before a mortal.

Upon this occasion, however, he treated them both with rather more than ordinary civility; nay, he even condescended to speak to the boy as if he were a reasonable creature capable in some degree of understanding him.

“There! that will do in the way of crunching, and peeling, and munching. Let alone the walnuts, William, and listen to me. I wish to speak to you about your future prospects, if you are not too great a fool to understand me.”

The boy coloured, pushed the offending plate from him, and fixed his fine intelligent eyes upon the face of his handsome, but stern-looking father ; but he said nothing.

“ That means that you will listen, I suppose ; but it would be more civil if you said so,” said Mr. Rixley.

“ I will listen,” said the boy.

“ Thank you, young sir ! you are excessively polite and obliging, not to say condescending and amiable. However, it may be as well to mention to you that if you do not listen now, you will never have an opportunity of doing so at all, for most certainly I shall not take the trouble of speaking twice to you upon a subject, which I consider as being much more interesting to you than to me.”

The boy looked steadily at him, but did not speak.

“ You heard me this morning offer you the choice of becoming a sailor, or remaining a book grub and becoming an usher. You heard me offer you the choice, I suppose ?”

“ I heard you say something about it, sir,” replied William, quietly.

"It was very obliging of you to listen so attentively," returned his father; "and I presume you also heard your stupid old nurse object to it, even though I proposed to teach you the trade myself?"

The face of William became as red as scarlet on hearing this disrespectful allusion to one whom he loved at once as a mother and a friend; but he replied firmly, "If Mrs. Lambert objects to it, sir, I should object to it too. I hope I shall never do anything that Mrs. Lambert objects to."

"Very well, my independent young sir: then an usher you shall be to the end of your days; and I hope you will have themes to correct, and boys to flog, to your heart's content."

William had been looking steadily in the face of his father from the time that this conversation began; but on hearing these last words, the expression of his speaking features suddenly changed, and a smile, that might have been construed into a look of rather saucy defiance, succeeded to the subdued and quiet air with which he had hitherto listened.

But the change in the boy's face was neither more sudden nor more striking than that which was perceptible in the father's. A sort of dry and hard indifference had seemed to be settling itself on the features of Mr. Rixley, but this was now changed to a look of brutal rage. His face was flushed, his brow contracted, his full under-lip was compressed for a moment by his large white teeth, and the glance which shot from his eyes had something vastly more like hatred than paternal love in it.

"You sneer at me, do you, Master William Lack-name? Pray do you know who you are? Perhaps your dearly-beloved Mrs. Lambert may have mentioned the fact to you; but if she has not, I will. I plainly perceive that it is high time you should know who and what you are. Did Mrs. Lambert ever disclose this interesting secret to you?"

"I don't know what you mean, sir," replied William. "I don't think that Mrs. Lambert ever told me any secret." •

"Very discreet. Very right. Very proper on the part of Mrs. Lambert. But the

reasons which kept her silent do not affect me ; therefore, Master William, I desire you to understand now, and to remember for ever, that, according to law, you are no son of mine ; and, therefore, whatever I do for you is a matter of grace and favour, and not to be sneered at. Do you understand me, sir ? I never was married to your mother. She was my mistress, sir, and not my wife. Do you comprehend what I am saying to you ?”

The effect of this announcement upon the poor boy was terrible ! The cruel words seemed to have turned him to stone. He uttered not a syllable ; but having looked steadily in the face of his savage father for a moment, as if to read there some trace of jesting falsehood, he crossed his arms upon the table before him, and hiding his face upon them, uttered one sharp cry of such deep anguish, that the frightened Helen rushed from the room, and, flying to Sarah Lambert, exclaimed, “ Oh ! come to poor William this very moment, dear Sarah ! I believe papa has said something that will kill him ! Something about his mother

Come with me, Sarah! Oh, if you had heard him groan as I did, you would not like to keep away from him!"

Sarah Lambert divined the truth in an instant.

"He has told him, has he?" she said; and then added, in a muttered murmur to herself, but too indistinctly for Helen to understand her words, "It follows quick. This is part and parcel of what has gone before. There is something brewing—something in the wind." And as she spoke she seized Helen by the hand, and hastened with her into the parlour.

"Oh! you are come to see the *denouement*, Mrs. Lambert, are you?" said Mr. Rixley, as they entered. "Did Helen tell you that I have announced to this young hero the blot in his escutcheon? I rather wonder, by the way, that he has never found it out before, for I really believe that pretty nearly every body in the parish knows it. But people sometimes are vastly discreet, when there is no earthly reason for their being so, and vastly the reverse when there is. Not that I mean to blame you about it,

Mrs. Lambert. It was quite right and proper that you should say nothing on the subject without my orders."

All this was said *sotto voce* to the greatly excited, but very quiet-looking, Mrs. Lambert, as she stood looking at the sobbing boy from a distance, while his sister hung fondly over him, whispering in his ear, "For my sake, dear, darling William! look up again! Never mind what he says. Remember how we have seen him use Sarah! Surely we ought not to mind anything he says to us, after that."

Her words were not heard in vain. William not only looked up, but rose from his chair; and taking the hand of his sister, which she had laid upon his arm, pressed it to his lips.

"Come into the garden with me, Helen!" he said, without appearing conscious that there was any one else in the room. "A walk under the lime-trees will do me good."

She, too, at that moment, seemed neither to see or remember any one but her brother, and hand in hand they walked out of the room together.

"Certainly that boy is the most audacious cub that ever was hatched," said Mr. Rixley, following them with his eyes; "and it would serve him perfectly right if I bound him apprentice to a tinker. My fool of a wife was the first who turned his head by her ridiculous petting; and there is no denying that you have had some share in it too, my sage old lady."

"I am sure if I have, Mr. Rixley, it has been done from mere idle thoughtlessness, and not because I fancied that a boy in his situation ought to be too much humoured and indulged; quite the contrary: for I know, of course, that he must make his own way in the world, and that he ought to be made to understand it."

This was said so precisely in the tone in which a cold-hearted and cautious confidential servant would have been likely to answer under the circumstances, that Mr. Rixley felt instantly relieved from all fear of opposition in his projects from the interference of the over-fond nurse.

"Quite true, Al You are perfectly correct in your notions on the subject," said

he, looking at her with very grave approbation; "and if you are to go on living here, as my housekeeper, I shall consider it as a great advantage that you should no longer behave to him as if he were my son and heir. There has been a great deal too much of it already. But things, as you must plainly perceive, I think, must all be put upon a new footing now. I am going to be married, Mrs. Lambert."

People who have taken the trouble of studying perhaps the most powerful, though not the most obvious, peculiarity in the female character, cannot but have perceived that a very strong and resolute power of self-control is at their command, when circumstances call upon them to exert it. It is needless to enter into the philosophy of the subject; but it might be easily shown, that this sort of passive power often very effectually supplies their want of strength, both moral and physical, in other respects.

There were at that moment two very opposite feelings at work within the heart of Mrs. Lambert, which between them made her think it was still worth while to live, in

spite of all the misery that weighed upon her.

The first—decidedly the first—of these, was the hope of obtaining revenge, in some shape or other, upon the man who had so basely treated her; the second was the hope that she might still be able, in some degree, to guard the children she loved from the sorrow and the suffering which their unprincipled father was likely to bring upon them.

She knew that they had hitherto profited greatly by her influence; but that influence, as she was now informed upon the best authority, she possessed no longer; and most women, upon becoming aware of this fact, might have been tempted to withdraw themselves from a scene where they could no longer hope to be useful, and where they were very sure of being wretched.

But Mrs. Lambert had a proud, and stiff, and sturdy spirit within her, which would have made the destroying herself by a bold leap from the cliff into the sea a much easier and a greatly less painful task than the seeking relief by quietly withdrawing herself from the man who had destroyed her.

But it required no long meditation to make her feel that if she still hoped to play an important part in the drama of Mr. Rixley's future life, it must be done under the shelter of a mask as deceptive as that which he had worn when persuading her that, with all his faults, he was a noble-minded being, who deserved her love.

And such a mask she felt that she had the skill to fabricate, and the courage to wear.

Nor was she mistaken in thus estimating her own powers. She knew, for she had already, poor soul, been often obliged to practise it, that she was capable of that sort of patient persevering self-control which could enable her to 'look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under it.'

And as a proof of this she now heard the man, whom but yesterday she had believed to be devotedly attached to her, proclaim his intention of being married to another, without manifesting, by any outward or visible sign whatever, that she was either surprised or pained by the intelligence!

He was himself, however, probably a little surprised, though certainly exceedingly well

pleased, by the quiet and perfectly contented, if not exactly delighted tone, in which she replied, "I cannot say that I am at all astonished at hearing it, Mr. Rixley. It is no more than I expected; and, of course, it is no more than is right and proper. Had it happened a few years ago, I dare say I should have thought differently about it; but women outgrow the follies and fancies of their youth much sooner than men do, unless they happen to be very great fools indeed; and, as far as I am concerned, I must say that if the lady is a real lady, and has got a good fortune, my opinion is that it is the very best thing you can do, both for yourself and Miss Helen."

"I am very glad to hear you say so, Mrs. Lambert," replied Mr. Rixley, very cordially, "and it just confirms me in the opinion I have always had of you. Some women, and a good many of them, if the truth must be spoken, are good for nothing on earth after their youth and beauty are over; but that's not the case with you by any means."

"I am sure it is very kind of you to say so, Mr. Rixley," she replied, without moving

a muscle; "and it is easy to reconcile oneself to gray hairs, when one hears an old friend speak as you do now. I think, Mr. Rixley, that the good opinion and friendship of such a man as you are, are better worth having than the young love of all the men in the world. Women, you know, grow old a great many years before men do; and I am quite convinced that all the women who have common sense enough to remember *that*, spare themselves a monstrous deal of vexation!"

"I tell you what, Almeria—I beg your pardon; I ought to call you Mrs. Lambert, and so I will henceforward, for you deserve to be treated with respect, and you shall have it from me, at any rate. But this is what I was going to say, Mrs. Lambert. I did not intend, when I came down here this time, to say anything more to you in the way of confidential talk, than merely that I was going to be married: and, to say the truth, I was more than half afraid that you would fly off in a passion, as so many women do when they hear that an old friend is beginning to think of the main chance a little, instead of going on love-making to the end of his days.

But you, my dear good soul, are such a capital first-rate creature, that I feel inclined to tell you a great deal more about myself than I ever did before ; and I have no doubt you may be very useful to me in many ways. Do you think you shall have patience to hear a long story ?”

“ Oh, dear ! yes, sir. I am quite sure I shall find it very interesting, if it is about yourself ; for I do assure you that you are quite as interesting to me now as you were when we were both younger, though, of course, in a different way,” she replied.

“ Very well ! that is just as it ought to be. But I won’t begin now. I will wait till those tiresome children are gone to bed, and then I will tell you a great many things, Mrs. Lambert, of which you have no notion as yet, I promise you. And there is a good chance that you may be useful to me, with your clever head, for there are one or two points upon which I have not quite made up my mind, and I shall like to have your opinion.”

CHAPTER VIII.

"Now, then, old acquaintance!" began Mr. Rixley, as soon as he found himself *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Lambert. "I presume there is no danger of our being interrupted? Rebecca Watkins is gone, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir. I locked and bolted the door after her a quarter of an hour ago," was the satisfactory reply.

"Now, then, sit down, Mrs. Lambert, and you shall hear a great deal more about me than I ever told you before. I think you will be rather surprised to find that you don't even know my real name."

"Is not your name George Rixley, sir?" said his companion, fixing her large eyes upon him with a look in which there seemed to lurk a suspicion that he was jesting.

“ You don’t believe me ? ” he said, laughing. “ But I am telling you nothing but the truth, Mrs. Lambert. My name is George, certainly, and once upon a time my name was Rixley, too ; but it is so no longer. My father’s name was Rixley ; but my mother was a Beauchamp, and her only brother, who died a bachelor, left me his estate on condition that I took his name : so I am now George Rixley Beauchamp, instead of George Rixley. This name and fortune, however, did not come to me till I was thirty years old ; and my father, being both devilish strict and devilish poor, I had led but a hard sort of life till old Beauchamp died ; for, as he never would tell anybody what he intended to do with his property, I could not borrow a shilling upon my chance of the estate. And what made my condition worse was, that I have a detestable younger brother, who was bred a parson, and who was a prig and a hypocrite from the hour he was born. If ever any man had a good right to hate another, I had a good right to hate him ; and hate him I did, and hate him I do, and hate him I shall, as long as I have life

enough left in me to love or to hate anything."

This profession of fraternal hatred was uttered with a degree of fervour, which left no doubt of its sincerity.

The blood of his greatly excited auditor seemed to curdle in her veins.

"The man is giving the last touches to the portrait of himself which he has drawn this day!" thought she, with a sort of mental shudder, which did not, however, in the very least degree affect her outward demeanour. She looked at him, indeed, with a stedfast composure of features, which gave to her pale face the aspect of a bust of marble, as motionless and still as if actually made of stone, yet having, like the portrait busts of Hiram Power, such an expression of living intellect, that 'one might almost say the *marble* thought.'

But Mr. Rixley, as he called himself, was in no condition to speculate upon what was passing in the mind of his auditor. He was thinking, feeling, living, wholly in himself, and for himself; and all that he was conscious of in the condition of his companion

was that she was a creature devoted to, and wholly dependent upon him, who might be useful, but who was infinitely too helpless and forlorn to do him any possible harm.

There was, therefore, no drawback to the pleasure with which he recounted a history of which he was himself the hero, and in the detailing which he might safely indulge himself by expressing his most hidden and most detestable feelings, without a shadow of fear that this egotistical outpouring could do him any injury.

"There is no need," he resumed, "that I should waste time in telling you all his diabolical ways of making me appear like a demon, and himself like an angel: it is enough that I should tell you that he did so, year after year, till everybody belonging to me, excepting my old uncle, who, luckily for me, had a natural antipathy to parsons, I do verily believe, thought I was too bad to live, and most likely prayed for my death."

"They must have been very wicked, then!" said Mrs. Lambert, who, as he stopped and looked at her, as if to ascertain the effect he

was producing, felt herself obliged to say something.

"Wicked?" he repeated, with an oath. "Yes, goody Lambert, I think you are tolerably right there. I don't think there was one of the set that did not deserve to be burnt alive. I think it may be taken as a proof of my having a very good temper, for in the midst of all this lecturing and torment I actually found time to fall in love. I did, upon my soul! deeply, madly in love! And now I will make you understand why, and how, it came to pass that I hated, do hate, and ever shall hate, my odious and every-way detestable brother. This girl, this lovely girl, for she was lovely, Mrs. Lambert, lovelier ten thousand times over than ever you were, though she had not your great bright Greek eyes—this girl refused me, and married my brother!—she did, upon my soul!"

And having reached this climax, Mr. Rixley Beauchamp paused in his narrative apparently to take breath, for he was very highly excited, and actually appeared gasping from vehement passion.

Mrs. Lambert was greatly more self-

possessed and composed. His fierce eyes were fixed upon her, however, and it was evident that he expected her to say something in reply. It is probable that she might have preferred remaining silent, but she was not in the mood, notwithstanding the tranquillity of her aspect, to yield to any such self-indulgent suggestion, and she said in a voice which, considering the circumstances, was marvellously steady and passionless. "And no great wonder that you hate him, sir! He seems altogether to have done quite enough, I think, to justify your hatred."

"Enough! yes, enough! and to spare, my good woman, for he seemed to live only for the purpose of making himself appear an angel, as I told you before, and me a demon! But now I must get on with what I want to tell you, for this part of my story makes me still feel as if I should go mad, when I think of it. The next thing that happened was, of course, that he had a son and heir born to him, and I had the gratification of hearing it pretty plainly hinted that our rich uncle Beauchamp was very likely to settle his

estate upon this very particularly beautiful boy! But now, Almeria, the scene suddenly changed, for our half-witted, old mummy of an uncle died at last, making me his sole heir! For a few years I was happy enough, as you will easily imagine, for my blessed brother was as poor as a rat, being disappointed in his hopes of getting a living, having a new baby born to him every year, and my father's affairs getting into worse condition every day he lived. But this state of felicity did not last long for me; my father died, and my mother's settlement, though not a large one, was quite sufficient to make her feel rich, when my father and his extravagant ways were removed; and then she went to live with her darling youngest son, and they all seemed to be living in Paradise together, and I will leave you to guess how much I enjoyed seeing it. I really believe I should have gone mad, if I had not just at that time taken a violent passion for boating. I was invited to join a cruising excursion on board Sir Solomon Jones' yacht, and we were caught in a gale that very nearly swamped us. Every one of

the company, except myself, were not only as sick as cats, but they all, more or less, showed the white feather, and the sailors on board did me the honour of declaring that I was the only man amongst them. It was this, I believe, that first put the fancy into my head . . . and then you know, as long as I remained in London or at Beauchamp Park either, I was sure to see and hear something of the man I hated, for as long as my mother lived, they continued to reside in London, where the hypocrite parson had at last got appointed to a chapel. So, upon reading in the newspaper a description of this place, I came down to look at it, and bought it immediately. The scheme answered perfectly; for by means of calling myself Rixley, and leaving out the Beauchamp, I altogether escaped the bore of being known in the county as Beauchamp, of Beauchamp Park. I brought down a devilish pretty girl, and called her Mrs. Rixley. She was the mother, you know, of your precious nursling, master William. But I took this idiot mother to sea with me one stormy day, merely because she was the

greatest coward I ever knew in my life, and I thought it would be good fun to hear her squall, and see her drenched in the spray, but I had no notion of its killing her, which it certainly did, as I dare say you have heard."

"I am no great gossip, Mr. Rixley," replied his deeply disgusted auditor, who felt, as she listened to him, a fresh pang of self-reproach for having been beguiled into loving the vile being to whose autobiography she was so demurely listening, "I am no great gossip, as you well know, and all I remember to have heard on the subject was that the first Mrs. Rixley died in consequence of a cold which she caught in boating."

"And I suppose my baby fool of a wife heard the same story," rejoined Mr. Rixley, "for though I often tried to coax her to go out with me, I never could persuade her to put her foot in the boat; and I must say, Mrs. Lambert, that you were fairly worth ten thousand of either of them, for though the only way I could ever give you a sail was the making you get up in the middle of

the night when the moon shone, we have had many a spanking voyage together : and nothing was ever so cleverly managed as the nursery night-work ! My idiot of a wife, fancying that nobody but herself could take sufficient care of her precious daughter either by night or by day, soon rendered our having separate rooms a matter of necessity ; and then, as you may remember, Mrs. Lambert, I positively forbade that the boy should be made such a milksop of, as to sleep in the room with a nurse, and this left us pretty tolerably at liberty, you know—and, upon my soul, you showed yourself a heroine upon more occasions than one. I never saw any woman in a boat behave like you ! It is a devilish pity you should ever grow old, for I don't expect that my young lady wife that is to be, will ever handle a rope as I have seen you do."

"If I had been a LADY, Mr. Rixley," replied his companion in a tone of the most philosophical indifference, "the chances are that I should never have handled a rope either. My father had been a hard-working, and very brave sailor in his youth, and it

was very natural that I should take after him."

"It may be very natural, Mrs. Lambert," he replied, "but it does not always happen, for all that. I am sure my pretty doll of a daughter is not at all like me, and that is one reason, I suppose, why I care so little about her. And now that just brings me round to the point I wanted to come to. The fact is, Mrs. Lambert, that I shall not be contented unless I have a son. That hateful brother of mine has one, and, moreover, he is one of the finest-looking young fellows that you ever saw in your life—just such a grown fellow as William is. But as to Helen, she is like nothing on earth but her mother, and she, as you know, was never well, and died at last quite young. Now, if Helen dies young, whom must Beauchamp Park and my ten thousand a-year go to? After all I have told you, Lambert, you cannot feel much at a loss to guess why it is that I am anxious to have a legitimate son."

"Oh dear, no! Mr. Rixley," she promptly replied, "I comprehend your motives per-

fectly!—And you have fixed upon the lady, have you?”

“Yes, to be sure I have,” he returned, laughing. “I should have thought that you knew me better than to fancy that I should have talked about it, before it was all settled. And a devilish lovely young creature I have chosen, I promise you—so young, indeed, that I don’t at all relish the thoughts of presenting Miss Helen to her. She must dislike the idea of being called *mamma* by a girl very nearly as tall as herself.”

“But how will you be able to manage, sir, so as to prevent it?” said Mrs. Lambert in a tone of friendly anxiety.

“Why, it does not seem very easy just at first thinking of it; but a clever head like mine, especially if assisted by another clever head like yours,” he replied, “may be able to find both the will and the way. I don’t think there is any great need of my dwelling upon the fact, that I would rather sell every acre of my uncle’s property, and throw the money into the ocean, than let my detested brother, or either of his children, have it.”

“Why, certainly, sir, after what you have

told me, I can't think it very likely you should wish for that: neither is there any danger that it should be so, while you have children of your own," replied Mrs. Lambert.

"Children! *A child*, I suppose, you mean? You don't imagine, you half-caste Greek Jack tar, do you, that I intend to bequeath my grandfather's long-descended Beauchamp acres to a bastard? Upon my soul, if I thought you had really any such notion in your head, I would turn you out of the house this instant, and never let you enter my presence again!"

"And very proper it would be that you should do so," returned the resolute woman, with the most stoical apathy, "I was only thinking of Miss Helen, sir."

"Very well, then. It is all very natural that you should think of Miss Helen, and if I were to die to-morrow, the whole of my grandfather Beauchamp's fine property would go to her. But this does not satisfy me, Lambert. Just think, what would happen, if you please, in case that girl should die! She is as like her mother as one egg is like another, and I think it very likely—very

likely indeed—that she may die early. Look at her little delicate hands and feet, Lambert, and then look at mine, and you will see at once that she does not take after me, in any way, but after her mother, who, though she lived the most healthy life possible, always in the country, you know, and never keeping late hours, or anything of the kind, died before she was thirty, or near it. The girl will do the same, and then the son of that d—d ungrateful woman who scorned my love, and of the detested brother who supplanted me, will become my heir! You may have some notion how detestable this idea is to my soul, by the fact that I already, though in pretty stout health, and not yet fifty years old, have made my will. I have, upon my soul, Lambert, I have made my will, and left everything I have in the world to Helen, which I did on account of my not being over sure that I might not, some coal-black night or other, get washed overboard among the rocks; and then, you know, they might have made out, perhaps, that the girl was just as illegitimate as the boy, and as they would all, of course, be leagued together

against her, you may guess what sort of a chance she would have had against them all. But for all that, Mrs. Lambert, I have no more intention of leaving the Beauchamp property to that wry-faced girl, than I have of leaving it to you. My intention is to marry, and a devilish fine young creature I have fixed upon, as I have told you."

"And upon my word, sir, it appears to me that you could not possibly do anything better," replied the attentive listener, without changing either in look or manner the perfect composure of her demeanour. "And how soon will the marriage take place?"

"Why that is just what I can't exactly tell you; and it is upon that very point I shall want your advice and assistance," he replied. "I have made my offer, and have been very graciously accepted; but I would much rather settle everything about Helen, and where she is to live, and who is to take care of her, and all that sort of plaguing business, before I actually settle the day. And now what I want to ask of you is, whether you would yourself be ready and willing to take charge of her?"

The resolute composure of the unhappy woman had lasted her to this point so well, that her voice had never for a moment faltered, nor had her complexion changed; but now she suddenly became as red as scarlet, and her eyes, which had been steadily fixed on the face of her master, now sought the ground as if she had no longer sufficient courage to look at him; and as to her voice, she trusted it not, but remained perfectly silent.

“Why, what the deuce is the matter with you, woman?” he exclaimed. “By Jove, one might think I had asked you to murder, instead of take care of her! What makes you colour up in that ridiculous way? And why do you sit there, as if you were struck dumb? Why can’t you answer a civil question civilly, and without keeping one an hour waiting for it?”

But Almeria Lambert was not a woman to be terrified, or overpowered, by rough language; on the contrary, this rudeness from her master at once restored the courage, which had almost failed her upon being made to remember that the protection thus

asked towards the being she most fondly loved could not be given by her, without degrading the object of this fond affection.

It was a dreadful thought, and as true as it was terrible; but she had been already called upon to stifle and conceal the strongest feelings of her soul, and had obeyed the call with a degree of courage which made her, as she felt, the master of the heartless wretch who tortured her. This thought at once restored her self-possession, though this last pang was sharper perhaps than all which had preceded it. "You must excuse me, sir, if for a moment I felt half frightened at the idea of your trusting the care of your heiress to me. It would bring such a deal of responsibility with it!"

"Don't be a fool, Lambert, and make mountains of mole-hills!" he replied. "In the first place I am not dead yet, if you please to observe, and in the next, you may as well remember that I intend to have a male heir before I die, so that your chance of having so important a personage as my heiress upon your hands, is but small."

"True, sir! that is very true indeed! I

forgot *that*," she replied with energy, "and it makes a great difference as to my saying yes, or no, to your proposal. Then if I say yes, sir, I may take it for sure and certain I suppose, that as soon as ever you have got a son born, you will destroy the will you have made, making Miss Helen your heir?"

"Yes, to be sure you may. But what a queer woman you are," was the reply. "I should have thought, considering what a great affection you have ever professed for her, that you would have rather seen her a great lady, and an heiress, than not."

"And so I should still, sir," she replied with great readiness, "if it was not so plain to see that you would rather leave your estates to a son, than to a daughter. And besides, Mr. Rixley, I feel quite sure that you will never leave either of the dear children in poverty. If I did not think *that*, I could not of course find it in my heart to wish for you to have a son."

"Well, Goody Lambert, I would rather hear you talk in that way, because it is no more than natural, and though I won't bind myself by promising anything fixed and

certain just at this moment, you may set your heart at ease about my not leaving you all three to starve. A pretty riot you would be kicking up, if I did, wouldn't you, old lady?"

"Why, of course, sir," she replied, now perfectly restored to composure, and to the part she intended to perform, "I should not rest very quietly in a starving condition, with a darling boy starving on one side, and a darling girl on the other, knowing, too, that their father possessed many thousands a year. But it would be nothing better than affectation, if I pretended to say that I have any such fears, for I have not. I dare say you will behave very handsomely. Only sir, there is one thing that puzzles me."

"Well! speak out; what is it?" demanded her master.

"You must promise not to be angry, Mr. Rixley," she replied, "for without that I had rather keep silence."

"Don't be a fool, Mrs. Lambert. I don't believe a word about your being afraid, so out with it. What is it that has puzzled you?" said he.

"Why, it is this, sir," she replied, with a sort of respectful curiosity in admirable keeping with the part she was performing, "I cannot guess why it was that you dismissed your servants, and gave over living like a gentleman, just about the very time that you made the will you tell me of, making Miss Helen a great heiress. I can't understand why you should have told me just then for the first time that it was very likely Miss Helen would, one day or other, have to take the place of Rebecca Watkins in the house."

"You shall not puzzle your old brains long about that, Mrs. Lambert," he replied, "for I will explain it at once. My purpose then, was exactly the same as my purpose now. When I gave you this notice, I had made up my mind to do exactly what I am about to do now, that is to say I had made up my mind to marry; and I had also made up my mind that in case I should have a son, I would make a will by which, as in duty bound, I should leave the whole of the Beauchamp property to my son, making, however, such a provision for the girl as her

penniless mother's daughter might have a right to expect; and that shall be enough for her to live upon, with you for a companion, Mrs. Lambert. And if she does not like that, she may make herself a teacher in a school, as her mother was before her. Why do you look at me so sharply, with your great eyes? Are you going to grumble at what I have said?"

"Pray, Mr. Rixley, do not say I look sharply at you," returned Mrs. Lambert, with exceeding meekness. "If you were to say that I looked as if I were listening with great attention, you would show that you understood me better. I have done my duty to your children since I was hired to attend upon them, and I sincerely wish to do so still; and it must be plain to you that in order to do this it will be necessary for me to understand what your intentions are about them."

"Yes. That is true enough, certainly," he replied. "But you need not talk about *them*, Mrs. Lambert. Let things turn out as they will after my marriage, you will have little or nothing more to do about

HIM. I have completely made up my mind that he shall be an usher in some country school, or other. Everything that parson Bolton has told me about him proves that it is exactly what he is fit for, so you need not give yourself any farther trouble on that subject. For the present, however, everything may go on exactly as it does now, only you won't have many more visits from me, I suppose, before the marriage takes place; not that I mean to give up my dear boat, not a bit of it, I promise you! When I am once safely married I shall make no scruple of coming down to the Warren House for the sake of a sail, though I shall not think it necessary to bring my beautiful wife with me. She never saw such a rough-looking barn of a place as this, since she was born, and the party she would find here would startle her a little too, I suspect. Don't you think so, Mrs. Lambert."

This question was asked with a gay laugh, and therefore Mrs. Lambert laughed too. But she was probably conscious that her muscles were more likely to rebel in making this attempt, than in performing anything

else she could require of them ; she therefore very discreetly pulled forth her pocket-handkerchief and applied it to her nose.

The device answered even beyond her hope, for Mr. Rixley Beauchamp laughed aloud as he looked at her, and exclaimed, "What a discreet personage you are becoming, Mrs. Lambert ! You do not choose that even I should see how greatly you feel amused at the idea of the future Mrs. Beauchamp's coming to pay a visit at the Warren House, and finding *you* here ?"

"Well, sir ! And if such a thought did come into my head," she replied, "I am sure it was very natural."

"To be sure it was, old friend ! And don't fancy I am going to be angry with you for that. Not a bit ! I won't say that I should exactly like to make the experiment, for the style and station of the future Mrs. Beauchamp is considerably more in accordance with the style of Beauchamp Park, than of Crumpton Warren House, and the place itself, as well as the live stock she would find here, might produce rather a disagreeable effect on her nerves."

The conversation then turned on the minor details of household economy ; all of which he seemed to have studied and arranged on a very modest style of expenditure ; but this was not a point that, as far as she herself was concerned, was at all likely to excite the most excitable feelings of her vehement character. It would not indeed have been easy for Mr. Rixley to have touched on any subject whereon she could have listened to him with so much genuine indifference. In fact she herself possessed, although he did not know it, quite as large an income as she required to maintain her. Her mother's death had put her in possession of about sixty pounds a year, which sum was transmitted to her by half-yearly payments, through the agency of a Falmouth banker. This money had hitherto been spent by her in a manner to make the pretty strict economy of Mr. Rixley as little injurious to the comfort of his children as might be. Among all the lamentable faults of this unfortunate woman's character, there was no mixture of sordid selfishness : and the reason she had never mentioned this little independ-

ence to her master was solely that she might be able to employ it for the use or gratification of the children, without being told, as she frequently was on all occasions of expenditure, that he did not wish his children to be over-indulged.

Perhaps it was fortunate that this branch of his discourse was so little interesting to her: for its discussion produced a look of such genuine weariness on the features of the miserable Almeria, that the self-occupied brute felt very comfortably persuaded the communication of his intended marriage, which he had somewhat dreaded to make, had not affected her very strongly: for that it was evident she was made more tired than angry, by his long statements respecting his future intentions concerning his children, and their future manner of life under her superintendence.

Nothing could be more accordant to her wishes than that he should so think; and when he taxed her with being so tired of his long story as to be very nearly asleep, she confessed that he was quite right, and that anything he might wish to say further

in the way of directing what was to be done about keeping up the garden, and the boat-house, when he was away, would be much more accurately remembered by her if he would be so good as to let her hear it the next day, when she would not feel so sleepy.

He immediately agreed to this, telling her that she might take herself off as soon as she pleased ; but adding, with a significant nod, accompanied by an equally significant laugh,—“ Your falling to sleep when I am talking to you of all my own affairs, is a pretty plain proof, my *ci-devant* beauty, that it is high time I should take me a wife. I suspect it is a sign that we are neither of us quite so young as we have been.”

“ Perhaps it is, sir,” replied Mrs. Lambert very quietly ; “ I wish you good night, sir ; and I shall be ready to hear all you may be pleased to have to say to-morrow.”

CHAPTER IX.

“THANK heaven! That is over, and never, never, never, can it come again;” soliloquised the unhappy woman, as soon as she had shut herself up within the shelter of her own room. “And this is the man to whom I have sacrificed my youth, my innocence, my happiness! But my misery, my frightful, frightful misery, is not all his fault! Let me be just, even in this hour of bitter agony! It is not his fault, but mine, if I have debased myself to the lowest pitch of degradation and infamy, in order to indulge a tender passion for such an animal as that! Had another painted him to me, as he has now painted himself, would I not have expended my last breath in denouncing that

other to the world as a liar and a slanderer? But what is there that human malice, or human invention could have attributed to him, that could have exceeded in vileness what he has recorded of himself? What has become of all the rainbow-colouring with which his accursed falsehoods beguiled my judgment, and made me fancy that all the shame and sin that surrounded me was in truth intellectual superiority, and devoted affection? Oh fool! fool! fool! And it is for this man, for this cold, hard, selfish villain, that I have sacrificed myself, soul and body! In this life, and in the next! For ever, and for ever, and for ever!"

It would be in vain to attempt to follow the wretched woman through all the fearful meditations of that dreadful night. It is probable that even her reason was in some degree shaken by the vehemence and the vainness of her self-reproaches, and by the intensity of the indignation, and the hatred which seemed to overflow and submerge her very heart and soul as she dwelt upon the systematic villainy by which she had been deluded, and destroyed.

To say that her once passionate love for her master was turned into as passionate hate, would be but a weak description of the feeling to which she now appeared to yield, and devote herself, and which seemed to resemble in its deep intensity the fanatic vehemence of a half-crazed religious enthusiast, about to atone for all past sins by a phrenetic devotion of himself to present suffering.

The light of the early morning sent its cold pale beams into her chamber before she had for a moment closed her eyes in sleep. She started almost in terror as she perceived this : for her aching head had been working at intervals throughout the night upon what she might best do for the interest of the children, and had pretty well decided that her best course would be openly to advocate their cause, and to shame the unprincipled father into securing to each of them such a provision as might secure them from the misery of absolute poverty.

But she knew that this could only be hoped for as the result of her resuming such a degree of influence over his mind as might induce him to listen to her on this important

theme with fear, if not with affection. But this again could only be hoped for by her being still able to subdue her own feelings with the same success which had hitherto attended her efforts to do so ; and this she felt could not be done if she met him with her head aching, and her pulses throbbing, as they did at present.

She rose from her bed, and, looking at her face in the glass, positively started, at perceiving the havoc which one night of vehement suffering had produced on her appearance. It is no fable which states that the colour of the hair will change in a single night. The hair of the unfortunate Almeria Lambert was peculiarly rich and abundant, and had been very nearly black ; but now one side of her head was almost as white as silver.

Vanity had nothing to do with the emotion which this discovery occasioned : her first, in truth her only thought upon the subject came in the shape of alarm lest HE should discover it, and suspect in consequence the sincerity of that indifference, the assumption of which was the only possible means by which she could gratify the burning longing

for revenge which had become the strongest feeling of her nature ; for all her other feelings, even those which her repentant heart now told her were the best and purest she had ever felt—namely, her love for the children she had nursed and cherished, as if they had been her own—even her love for them called upon her to take vengeance against their unnatural father. It has been said, truly enough, that we are all disposed to

‘ Atone for sins we are inclined to,
By damning those we have no mind to ;’

and it was probably for this reason that the enormous proportion of selfishness which the present plans of Mr. Rixley Beauchamp displayed, caused them to raise so fierce a feeling of anger, and of hatred in the heart of Mrs. Lambert, for she had no selfishness in her. If, by sacrificing everything she had in the world, she could benefit those she loved, or in any way increase their happiness, the doing so would have given her more keen gratification, and more really heart-felt joy, than any other thing that could have befallen her.

To her own personal gratification and convenience, she was very nearly insensible, and still more nearly indifferent; but to minister to the pleasure, the happiness, the gratification in any way of those she loved, seemed to make earth a heaven to her.

By the slight sketch which has been already given of her early history, it may be easily perceived that the broad boundary line between right and wrong had never been very clearly pointed out to her: and the miserable result of this has been sufficiently shown. But even this deficiency, lamentable as it was, would not have brought her so low as she had fallen, had it not been that her imagination was as super-abundantly active, as the moral sense was torpid.

The sort of mystery in which the goings, and comings, of Mr. Rixley were involved, the remarkable incongruities in his mode of living, the lavish expenditure which attended all the arrangements in which his nautical amusements were concerned, and the close economy which he exhibited on almost every other occasion, would all have suggested to most people, as they certainly did to his

very miserable wife, that his resources were precarious, and uncertain, if not absolutely disreputable; nay even this last idea often, and very painfully, suggested itself to her, in consequence of the very evident repugnance which he displayed upon every occasion, where there seemed a probability of meeting strangers, to accept any of the rare invitations addressed to him.

But no such reasonable thoughts ever suggested themselves to the unfortunate Almeria, though she too had her meditations on the subject. She had fabricated a romantic theory of her own, by which she contrived to convert all the selfish caprices of her master into so many proofs of his noble nature, and his arduous struggles to maintain his family, without sharing the anxieties of his (probably) very uncertain position, either with his wife, or with herself.

She had, in fact, persuaded herself, purely by the workings of her own imagination, that Mr. Rixley was a merchant, and not always a very prosperous one, and that when he left them, it was solely to attend to his mercantile concerns; and that when he

lavishly spent money upon his boat, and its costly accompaniments, it was both because some lucky speculation had answered, and also because the moonlight hours which he spent in that dear boat with her, were the happiest of his existence !

It is not very difficult to imagine, therefore, what her feelings must have been, on learning that the man who had perpetually reproached his gentle, meek-spirited wife, because her very humble housekeeping was not humble enough, had been for years living in the uncontrolled enjoyment of an income of many thousands a-year ; that the only reason for his having married at all, was, for the sake of gratifying his fiend-like hatred of his brother, and that *now* the dearest hope of his life was, that by the birth of another child, he might be able, at his own death, to leave his beautiful, innocent, motherless daughter, in a position too obscure for her ever to profit, in any way, by the wealth and station he himself enjoyed !

As to her own share in the terrible exposition of this long-drawn tale of treachery, hatred, perfidy, and hypocrisy, she saw—she

understood—she felt—it all; but, nevertheless, when contemplating the whole series of his life's dark history, she was hardly conscious that she was thinking of herself, and yet her share of it was not the least tragical part of the drama.

It was thus that the long-deluded woman passed the hours which immediately followed the discovery of her having bound herself, body and soul, to a much viler being than any she had ever conceived it possible could exist, and that too by the sacrifice on her own part of everything that might have left her the comfort of self-respect to console her in her misery.

That she was in no degree blind to the sin and degradation to which she had submitted herself by yielding to her unbridled passion for the man she now so deeply detested, was proved by the melancholy depth of her conviction, that, with all her tender pity, and devoted love, for the poor friendless Helen, she could only bring her to shame and woe, by cherishing, and watching over her! The more she meditated on this terrible idea, the more its unquestionable

truth became evident, till every other sorrow and regret seemed swallowed up in the feeling, nearly approaching to despair, which it brought with it.

Yet still she felt that the destiny of this dear child was not decided, and could not be decided for many months, or it might be for years to come. It might be that she would inherit the whole of her father's noble property, and if she did, her less fortunate brother would most assuredly be also well provided for by her. And for a few moments while these pleasant thoughts held possession of her mind, her spirits were soothed, her throbbing pulses became hushed, and she fell into a deep sleep which endured for an hour or two, and which probably saved her from absolute madness.

Her waking from this sleep was certainly terrible; but, nevertheless, the good effect of it was not lost; for though profoundly wretched, she was in perfect possession of her reason, one proof of which was that the most fixed and stedfast object of her thoughts, from the moment that she roused herself to a perfect consciousness of her situation, was

the finding some protection for Helen, less injurious than her own.

Mr. Rixley Beauchamp meanwhile enjoyed a night of undisturbed repose. It was some time indeed since he had felt so completely at ease in his mind, and so every way comfortable as he did on retiring to rest that night. Not that he had ever been tormented by any scruples, or by any doubts as to what he should do, in order so to arrange his affairs as to leave him at perfect liberty to follow his own wishes, and his own will, in every respect. But he was not altogether without a feeling of uneasiness as to the manner in which "old Lambert" might receive the news of his intended marriage. This uneasiness, however, was now passed, and over. The woman had behaved, as he was quite ready to allow, admirably well, and he was a lucky fellow for having secured the services of such a steady sensible person to take charge of his plagues of children.

It was with this comfortable thought that he turned himself snugly round upon his pillow, and went to sleep.

It was not the custom of Mr. Rixley Beauchamp to breakfast with his children. Strong coffee, and new laid eggs, could in no way be considered as fit provender for them, and notwithstanding the revolting fact that William was very nearly as tall as his father, it was considered by that father as much more seemly that he should continue the wholesome habit of eating a bowl of bread and milk with his sister in the school-room, than that he should be deluded into fancying himself a gentleman, and a fitting companion for himself.

So the master of the house, as usual, took his coffee and eggs in solitary state, a part of that state consisting in his being waited upon during the meal by Mrs. Lambert.

His first glance at her countenance on that morning, though it had no mixture of fear in its expression, had something of curiosity in it. He did not feel quite sure as to the temper in which he should find her: for the temper of Mrs. Lambert had never been an *even* temper, her secret thoughts having sometimes led her to be very sad, while her secret feelings, while believing

herself the only loved one of the man she loved, had oftener led her to be joyfully serene, if not exactly joyously gay.

But Mr. Rixley Beauchamp, though he certainly did not meditate upon the subject very deeply, was nevertheless quite aware that the news he had communicated to her on the preceding evening must necessarily have made her perceive that her position was greatly changed, and he did not feel quite certain that she would behave as well to-day as she had done yesterday.

He had, however, the very great satisfaction of perceiving that her countenance expressed nothing in the least degree approaching to ill-humour; and so well pleased was he by the discovery, that he told her to sit down by him and let him explain to her exactly what he intended to do about Helen.

"As to the boy," he added, "we need not waste our time in talking about him. His fate is settled and sealed. He shall be an usher in some country grammar-school. Bolton says that he is the best scholar he ever had, and that's a proof, you know, that he is fit for the business. Moreover,

my dear Lambert, to tell you the truth, I don't think he is fit for anything else. He is a milk-sop, Lambert. If he had been a fine spirited fellow, such as I was at his age, I should very likely have got fond of him. But I never came down here in my life, that I did not find him either coaxing and kissing my idiot of a wife, or else looking at Helen as if he were quite ready to hold her doll for her, if she was tired of holding it herself. In short, I hate the boy, that's the truth; and that's one reason why I rather enjoy the idea of his being an usher, for I'd much rather sweep the streets myself."

Had Mrs. Lambert permitted her master at that moment to have seen the expression of her countenance, it is possible that he might have come to a different conclusion respecting her state of mind. But she was far too much self-possessed to hazard any such experiment as looking at him, being, on the contrary, very particularly engaged at the moment in rinsing his coffee cup preparatory to its being replenished.

"As to the girl," he continued, "I don't say that I have any dislike to her, for I really

have not. She is certainly very pretty, and that, you know, is the best thing that a woman can be; and if I have no son, she will be my heiress, and in that case, of course, I shall bring her forward, and see that her education is properly finished. But meantime, Lambert, I intend that she shall remain here with you. For the next year or two, this will be quite as well for her as the finest school I could put her to; and if I am so fortunate as to have a son, I will leave a couple of thousand pounds in your hands, which will be quite enough for your adopted daughter, *Helen Rixley*. For, mind you, Goody Lambert, she is never to hear the name of Beauchamp unless I should fail to have a son. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, sir, perfectly," replied Mrs. Lambert, in a tone, and with a manner that expressed the most dutiful attention to his words.

"I shall not sell this place at present," he resumed, "and I shall let you remain here as long as I keep it, and what may happen afterwards, will depend very much upon your conduct, and that of the girl."

"And I hope, sir, that you will find no

cause to be displeased with either," was her respectful reply.

"And I hope so too. But I shall not stand upon much ceremony with either, if I see, or hear of anything that I disapprove," said he, rising, and taking up his hat, which lay in a chair near him. "I am now going to my boat to enjoy my last free sail for a long time, perhaps, for immediately after my marriage I shall probably only stay here for a few hours, if I come at all, for it will only be to settle with the Falmouth banker about the payment of the sum I shall allow to you and Miss Helen, for your housekeeping, and it may be that I shall even manage that by writing. However, in case I should be drowned to-day, Goody, remember there lies my will in that old desk yonder. I have taken good care that neither my dearly beloved brother, nor any of the cursed imps belonging to him, shall profit in case of my sudden death, either by sea or land. When I am married, and have a lawful son born, alive and thriving, it will be a different affair; but till that happens, I will keep guard over it as carefully as if it secured

the property to myself, instead of to pretty Miss Helen. And now good morning to you, Mrs. Housekeeper. I suppose you have not forgotten the orders I gave you at dinner yesterday about letting me have a good boat luncheon packed for me this morning?"

"Oh, no, sir! It is quite ready, and I suppose old John may follow you down with it?" said Mrs. Lambert, looking at him with an expression of such placid obedience that he rewarded her with a very cordial and merry slap upon the shoulder, exclaiming at the same time, "That's right, old woman! You are a trump now, as you always have been. It used, you know, to be the queen of hearts, but now, by Jove, I think you are the ace of clubs, for you are as powerful in your place as Hercules himself could be! But don't forget, if you please, that another proof of your power must be displayed by getting ready a first-rate supper for me when I come back to-night; for I mean to see the moon rise, I promise you, and I shall be as hungry as a wolf."

CHAPTER X.

To most women it would have been a relief to find herself alone after such a scene as the above, but it was not so to Almeria Lambert. She had been exerting every faculty to enable her to act a part—a most difficult part; and she had been perfectly conscious the whole time that she had acted it well, wonderfully, admirably, astonishingly well. This conscious success had sustained her strength, and made her feel for the time that hers was the predominant spirit, and that the tyrant villain she so deeply hated was still her slave.

But no sooner was the unhappy wretch alone, than all the deep and desperate misery of her condition rushed back upon her heart, and completely overwhelmed her. It must

have been a hard-hearted being who could have looked at her then, without compassion. All the illusions of her life had vanished as suddenly as if charmed away by the wand of an enchanter. She saw, with terrible clearness, *what* she herself had been, and *what* the being for whom she had made herself the wretch she was ! The idea of looking at the pure and innocent girl who had been consigned to her unholy guardianship was dreadful to her, and she rose from the chair into which she had fallen when her master left her, and with a rapid movement closed the door, and locked it.

And then she re-seated herself ; and then with a sort of hard composure which had greatly less of sober reason, than of desperate resolution in it, she sat herself to think upon the future. That the fearful passion of revenge was busy at her heart, cannot be doubted ; and yet it came in such a questionable shape that she knew it not, for it seemed to herself that her only wish—her only thought—was how she could make *atonement* for the grievous sins she had herself committed.

But whatever of good, or whatever of evil, might have been at work within her during the next dreadful hour or two, no fair judgment could have been passed upon her either for the one, or for the other; for assuredly she was not in the full possession of her reason.

Meanwhile the unfortunate children of a most guilty father sought what naturally seemed the best and only solace within their reach, namely the comfort of an unrestrained discussion in the school-room between themselves, respecting the cruel scene of the previous day.

Their childish breakfast had been placed before them by their umwhile nurse, with an intimation that if they wanted anything more, they were to apply to Rebecca Watkins for it, for that she should herself be too much engaged to attend to them.

And having said this, she left them to their melancholy talk, and she sighed as she remembered how melancholy it must be. "And yet," thought she, as she silently turned away, "how blessed is their condition, when compared to mine!"

"I don't think we shall trouble Rebecca Watkins to give us any more breakfast," said Helen, with a melancholy smile, "I don't feel as if I should ever be hungry again."

"And it is I, my poor Helen, who am the cause of all you suffer!" cried William, striking his forehead with his clenched fist. "I!—I who would gladly give half the years of my life if I could be an honour and credit to you during the other half! But instead of that, my very existence is a disgrace to you! How much better would it have been for you, Helen, if I had never seen the light of day!"

"How can you talk such cruel and hard-hearted nonsense, William!" exclaimed the poor girl, bursting into tears. "You must know so very well, William, that you are the person I love best in the world! You must, and you do know it, and yet you have the heart to wish that you had never been born! Is'nt this being cruel?"

"No, no, no!" replied the unhappy lad, his pale lips trembling with emotion. "It is because I love you, as well as you love me, that I wish I had never been born; and I

believe that both you and I too ought to wish that I was dead, for then at least I could not be a disgrace to you!"

"Why," said she, "do you say such dreadful words to me, William? Why should you be a disgrace to me? All the shocking things papa said last night, cannot make any real difference in you. If it is all true, it is no fault of yours. And perhaps it is not true, perhaps he said it only because he was in a passion. You know when papa is in a passion, he always does say shocking things. But considering how old and tall you are, William, you ought to know better than to mind it so very much."

"It is only because you are not so old, my poor Helen, that you do not mind it more. Not only am I between three and four long years older than you are, my poor child, but for hours and hours, Helen, when you have been a-bed and asleep, I have been reading, reading, reading all sorts of books! You know what a quantity of books poor mamma used to read, and I too read them all, and a great many more besides that I have got from Mr. Bolton's library, and I know a great deal

better than you do, Helen, what my situation really is. I wonder if your dear mother knew the truth? If she did, she must indeed have been an angel to behave so like a real mother to me!"

And here the unhappy boy once again buried his face in his hands, and sobbed like a girl.

It was in vain that Helen threw her arms around his neck, and endeavoured to comfort him by her endearing caresses; for so strongly had the painful idea taken possession of him that the close affinity between them was, and must ever be a disgrace and injury to her, that the caressing repetition of the name of brother, by which again and again she fondly addressed him, seemed instead of a comfort, to be a torture to him; and when at last he raised his head and looked at her, she was positively frightened at the altered expression of his features, and the look of gloomy misery which she read in his eyes.

"Helen!" said he, with great solemnity, "You must never call me by that name again! It is a disgrace to you, and can

only be a pain to me. Could any act of mine do you any sort of service, Helen, I think that I would gladly give my life to achieve it. But as it is between us now, sweet love, my best advice is that you should never call yourself my sister. The fact is—and you should thank God for it, Helen—the fact is that we cannot feel alike towards the man that we both call father. I am far—oh! very far—from wishing that there should be any sympathy between us on this subject!”

And here he paused, and for a moment or two remained profoundly silent, but then added in an accent which made her tremble, —“HELEN! I HATE HIM!”

* * * *

Helen was by no means a weak-minded young girl. She was, on the contrary, a very intelligent, and a very reflective person for her age; and minds so constituted are not apt to experience the painful sensation of terror, lightly. But it was terror that she felt at that moment, for the whole aspect of her brother seemed changed, and one of the noblest and most intellectual coun-

tenances that ever was looked upon seemed suddenly to be metamorphosed before her eyes, and to become the type at once of the most vehement rage, and the most bitter suffering.

Nor were the delicate features of Helen deficient of expression in their turn, and her look of mingled fear and woe seemed to recal her brother to a better or a calmer state of mind, for he took her hand gently and kindly in his, and said, "Do not let me frighten you with my violence, Helen! And whatever may happen to me, dearest, remember always that if I had loved you less, I should have borne the degradation which has fallen upon me better. I did so dearly cherish the thought of being your friend, and your protector through life, that the suddenly being informed that I am in a condition too degraded to permit of my being so, has overpowered me. But love me still, Helen! Though I may be forced to leave you, and though our destinies, if I continue to live, must, perforce, be sure to throw us very widely asunder, let me, to my very last hour, believe, that notwith-

standing the stigma that is upon me, you will still remember me with affection."

Helen's reply to this may be easily imagined. She threw her arms round his neck, and told him, while a shower of tender tears poured down her cheeks, that no sister ever loved a brother more fondly than she loved him, and that she did not believe that any girl living could have a brother, who so well deserved her love.

"Bless you, my Helen!" he replied, while his manhood, stout as it was, could not prevent his eyes, too, from shedding some drops which showed that there was still left some of that tender softness of nature, which in the midst of all his lightness of heart had so effectually endeared him to the small circle within which he had lived, save with the one exception of his unnatural father.

Had his situation and prospects been less miserable, he might indeed have been considered as an individual peculiarly favoured by nature, for he certainly possessed in no common degree the qualities and the faculties which are most calculated to insure happiness. With a form and features of very

uncommon comeliness, he had a constitution, both of mind and body, indicative of a degree of firmness and vigour, that seemed to promise success in whatever he undertook; and the enthusiastic affection, with which his very heart and soul repaid kindness, rendered him a being that it seemed impossible *not* to love.

But the hard chance, which made him find in his own father a being from whom his heart shrank with abhorrence, seemed to have changed his nature, and what under other circumstances would have constituted the noblest feature of his character, now appeared forcing him to desperation and to sin.

Hatred was now almost as busy at his heart, as love; and he was so conscious of this, that he shrunk from the look of earnest and affectionate enquiry which his sister fixed on his strangely-altered features.

"Let me leave you now, Helen!" he said; "I am no fit companion for you, in any way. I cannot go to Mr. Bolton to-day. Let me be quite alone! I will walk! Perhaps the dreadful thoughts which seem

to have taken possession of me may leave me, in the stillness of a solitary walk. I shall not come home to dinner, Helen, so do not wait for me. Tell poor dear Sarah Lambert that I love her dearly, and the more dearly, Helen, because I know she will always love you. God bless you both !”

And with these words he turned away and left her.

Poor child ! She little guessed at that moment how fearfully important she would learn to consider every word he then said to her ! And yet her heart sank within her as she lost sight of him, and she wept long and bitterly ; for the solitude in which he left her was, for several hours, perfectly uninterrupted.

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. LAMBERT meanwhile sat herself down in the parlour as soon as her master had left it, and remained there perfectly alone for nearly an hour. She could not, however, have been said to be idle, for if her limbs were at rest, her brain was at work, and on themes, too, of such deep importance, that instead of remaining thus silent, and thus still, for one hour, she would willingly have continued thus deeply meditating on the future for many. But this could not be. She had much to do, and a will still stronger than her wish for meditation, to make her do it.

For a moment she paused before the door of the school-room, and she longed to open it; but she did not yield to the temptation,

for she neither wished to waste her time nor to agitate her spirits; and she passed on to the kitchen, where all necessary preparations were made for the substantial supper which her master had ordered to be ready against his return.

She, moreover, gave such instructions to Rebecca Watkins as she thought sufficient to supply the wants of the less important portion of the family for the day, and all this being accomplished in a very steady and business-like manner, Mrs. Lambert put on her bonnet and shawl, and set off upon a walk to the parsonage.

She was no stranger there, for both the young people, without having any such intention, and in fact without being conscious of what they were about, had impressed the Bolton family with a very decided feeling of respect for Mrs. Lambert.

Innocent as angels of the nature of her real position in their father's house, they had ever spoken of her to their kind friends the Boltons with the truest respect and affection, and though the good clergyman and his wife did not see her often, for Mrs.

Bolton was as devoted a mother as Mrs. Lambert was a house-keeper, all the intercourse which had ever been between them was of the most friendly kind.

When, therefore, she now knocked humbly at the parlour door, she was greeted with a friendly smile both by the good clergyman and his wife, when she opened it in compliance with the hospitable command "Come in!"

After the first words of salutation had been exchanged, Mr. Bolton, fixing his friendly eyes on the face of the visitor, exclaimed, "You are not well, Mrs. Lambert! and you are not only looking unusually pale, but you look harassed and unhappy. I trust that nothing is the matter with either of my dear pupils?"

If it had happened that her master had made the same discovery while she had waited upon him during the morning meal, it might have annoyed her greatly; but now the observation was a relief to her, for it at once offered an opening for the communication she wished to make, and for the dismal tale she had to tell.

"My looks, then, are a faithful index of my mind," she replied, "I am, indeed, harassed, and unhappy, and to a gentleman, like you, sir, and to your good lady, too, your knowing this will be more likely than anything to make you listen to me."

"Sit down, Mrs. Lambert," was the kind reply, "and if we can either of us be of any use to you, be very sure that we shall not shrink from any trouble it may bring with it. There is nothing the matter with the young people, is there?"

"They are both well in health, sir," she replied, "and yet it is on their account that I am so miserable. As to myself," she added, withdrawing her eyes from Mr. Bolton's face, and fixing them on the ground, "I neither want nor wish for aid from any one. I have forfeited all right to the friendship of the good, and my pecuniary situation is such as to render their pecuniary assistance unnecessary."

Mr. Bolton changed colour, and, most involuntarily, started as she said this. The unfortunate Mrs. Lambert both saw and understood this, perfectly. Had the unhappy

woman not been the mistress of her every way vicious and unprincipled master, she might have been cited from one end of the country to the other as the most perfect pattern of an excellent servant that could be found in it. She herself knew this as well as Mr. Bolton did, and it was this consciousness of her own merit which enabled her at once to perceive that the nature of her self-accusation was already understood.

The silence of a moment followed, and then Mr. Bolton raised his eyes and said, as he directed them towards his wife, "If you wish to consult me as a clergyman, Mrs. Lambert, and as the minister of your parish, it would be better perhaps that I should see you alone."

"You will cease to think so, sir, when you shall have heard what I am going to say," she replied. "If it were of myself, and my own affairs, that I was about to speak, I should receive your rebuke with equal deference and obedience; but in that case, Mr. Bolton, it would not have been necessary, for I should never have presumed to speak to you on the subject at all. But it

is concerning your pupils, sir, and of their very terrible position, that I wish your advice, and perhaps your assistance, and that of your lady also. Fear not, that I should make any further reference to myself. You have understood the words I have already spoken as I intended you should understand them; and this, as far as I am concerned, is all that is necessary."

The wretched woman felt that the worst part of the task she had set herself in seeking this interview, was now over, and she at once felt restored to all the cool, deliberate, and resolute, self-possession which made so remarkable a feature in her character.

"Go on," said Mr. Bolton, after the pause of a moment.

"My master is not, as I believe, in any respect the sort of person that he is considered to be in this very neighbourhood," she resumed. "In the first place, he is not known here by his real name; in the second, instead of being in the necessitous circumstances which he has affected, as an excuse for his parsimonious manner of living, he is a man of distinguished family, and the

possessor of a large and long descended property ; and, in the third, the fine noble-hearted boy who has had, amidst all his misfortunes, the great good luck of having been your pupil, sir, has in fact no right to any name at all, his unfortunate mother not having been the wife of his father."

" Your statement respecting Mr. Rixley's real name and circumstances is quite unexpected, certainly, and I believe the whole neighbourhood to be as much in the dark on the subject as myself," replied Mr. Bolton. " But it is otherwise respecting what you tell concerning his son, for most persons, I believe, are aware that he was never married to the poor boy's mother. I love the lad most sincerely ; and most truly rejoiced should I be, were it ever to be in my power, to assist him in any way ; but I will frankly confess to you, Mrs. Lambert, that having for so many years avoided any personal familiarity with Mr. Rixley, and remained so perfectly in ignorance of all the mysteries which seem to be attached to him, I have no wish whatever to become more acquainted with him now than I have hitherto been ;

and I shall be obliged to you if you will excuse my not listening to any further details about him."

Mrs. Lambert remained silent for a moment; and, notwithstanding all her self-possession, she felt utterly at a loss how to proceed; but fortunately for her, and for the helpless being whose cause she meant to plead, her pale and sunken features assumed an expression of such deep and true despair, that the kindly heart of Mrs. Bolton was too profoundly touched to resist it.

"Perhaps, Stephen," said she, addressing her husband, almost in a whisper, "perhaps you might do good by listening to what she has to say."

The intellect of Mr. Bolton was an intellect very greatly superior to that of his wife, but it would have been difficult to have found anywhere a heart of finer quality than hers. One of the good gifts belonging to that heart was its true allegiance in all ways to her husband, and it was rarely indeed that she uttered any word which might be construed into the expression of an opinion different from what had been previously

given by him. But when this rare occurrence did take place, it invariably produced, as all rare occurrences do, a considerable effect, and the words which I have given were no sooner spoken than the countenance of the clergyman underwent a marked change; its cold, and almost stern expression relaxed, and he said, "My good wife is right, Mrs. Lambert. Go on, and tell me everything you wish to say. My reason for stopping you arose from my dislike to hearing anything like secret communications respecting the affairs of my neighbours, in which I can do no good. But if you think I can be useful to the children or to yourself, I am quite ready to listen to you."

"I beg you to believe, sir, that I know what is due to you, and to your lady, better than to ask assistance from either of you for such a person as myself. Neither do I require assistance from any one. But concerning these unfortunate young people I have the double reason arising from their great need of help, and the consciousness of my own unfitness to render it. May I not add that the great kindness which they have

hitherto received, both from yourself and your lady, has seemed to justify my asking the help which they so greatly need from you?"

"Yes, Mrs. Lambert, you are right, quite right. Let us hear in what way you think we can be useful to them."

This permission, to speak freely, seemed for a moment only to impede her power of speaking at all, for on receiving it she raised her hands to her eyes, and remained, as it seemed, lost in thought. But then she began by stating to them, with scrupulous exactness, precisely the narrative which she had received from her master on the preceding day, apologising for the strength of the language she used when describing his hatred towards his brother by saying that as she earnestly desired to make them comprehend his real feelings, and his real motives, she preferred repeating the precise words in which he had expressed them, however painful it might be either to speak, or hear them.

Having rapidly, but very accurately repeated all he had told her of his early life,

she alluded to the commencement of her own fatal acquaintance with him as slightly as was consistent with her purpose of making them acquainted with the facts, and the only portion of the narrative that she dwelt upon in which she was herself concerned, was that which first followed her domestication in his family; but she only did so sufficiently to make her auditors comprehend that, during this time he had succeeded in persuading her that notwithstanding his frequent absences from the Warren House, he was still devotedly attached to her.

"I mention this," she continued, "in order to enable you in some slight degree to understand the effect which his recent disclosures have produced. It was only yesterday, Mr. Bolton, that he communicated to his unfortunate son the wholly unsuspected fact of his illegitimacy. The effect of this disclosure upon the young man was terrible—very, very terrible! I have always been aware that he was a highly sensitive, and very noble-spirited boy, but I certainly should never have anticipated that he would have felt such agony at being made ac-

quainted with this stain upon his birth. That the blow fell the more heavily from the savagely unfeeling way in which it was given, cannot be doubted; and the fearful and desperate glance of hatred which it produced,—it was but one glance! for the boy never raised his eyes to his unfeeling father again,—will never pass from my memory! But Mr. Rixley only sneered at him.”

And here for a moment the miserable woman covered her face with her hands, and remained silent; when she removed them she was perhaps paler than ever, but there was an air of steadfast and immovable composure in her features which seemed to indicate that the most terrible part of her narrative was over, and that whatever remained for her to tell would be spoken with more calmness. “It was yesterday also,” she continued, “that he for the first time informed me of its being his purpose to marry immediately, adding that he had selected a bride, beautiful, high-born, and wealthy. He added also that he was greatly enamoured of her, but that he had reasons,

stronger still, for deciding upon again enduring the matrimonial yoke. "I marry," said he, "wholly and solely in the hope of having a son, for I will not leave it within the reach of possibility that my hateful brother should inherit my estate."

And then in a perfectly clear and steady voice, Mrs. Lambert went on recapitulating all that the reader knows already respecting his having guarded against the danger of his brother's succeeding as heir-at-law, in the case of his sudden death, by having made a will bequeathing the whole property to his daughter.

Having reached this point of her narrative, Mrs. Lambert paused, and remained silent for a minute or two, with her hand pressed upon her forehead, as if her memory had lost the thread connecting what she had said with what she was about to say.

"But I see not how I can be of any use in these affairs," said Mr. Bolton, more from a wish to assist her in recovering her memory than from any desire to check her narrative.

"Pardon me, sir, for being so prolix,"

she replied quickly, and with every appearance of being in very perfect possession of all her faculties. "The nature of the assistance which I hope to find from the benevolent kindness of yourself and your lady will be sufficiently evident. Having informed me, as I have stated, of his having taken this precautionary measure, which he seemed to laugh at, however, as he mentioned it, he went on to inform me that it was still his intention to keep his present, and his future family, in ignorance of the obscure marriage which he had formerly contracted, and which death had fortunately dissolved, and to be equally reserved on the subject of his having two children inhabiting a remote house, which they, none of them, knew he possessed. 'As to the boy,' he added, 'I shall immediately make an usher of him'—and then, at the same time, I think it was, he told me that I was to continue at the Warren House to take care of his daughter, adding that he should provide for the maintenance of us both. And it is concerning this last announcement, sir, that I want your advice and assistance. Had I been . . .

other than what I am . . .” said the unhappy woman bursting in tears, “I would have accepted the precious charge with joy and gladness, and while waiting upon her with all the duty of a servant, I should have loved her with all the tenderness of a mother; but as it is!” . . . And here she stopped, and the first tears she had shed during the interview escaped from her eyes, and rolled down her pallid cheeks.

For a moment her auditors both remained silent, but even so they both managed to reply to the appeal made to them in a way that very clearly showed that they felt the force of it. Both Mr. Bolton and his wife fixed their eyes upon the carpet and gently shook their heads. But this mute avowal that they both agreed with her in opinion as to the impossibility of her being permitted to take charge of their dearly beloved Helen, was not all the answer she received. In a voice of deep sympathy, and of very earnest kindness also, Mr. Bolton hastened to reply, “Mrs. Lambert, I am quite sure that I speak the sentiments of my wife, as well as my own, when I tell you that

your conduct upon this occasion is exactly everything that it ought to be. We know wonderfully little of Mr. Rixley personally, considering how many years we have been neighbours, and how long I have been employed to assist in the education of his children; but all we do know of him must naturally lead us to wish that we may know nothing more, and most especially that we may not be led by any circumstances into the necessity of holding personal intercourse with him. You will easily understand this, Mrs. Lambert, and I feel confident that you will carefully avoid the either doing or saying anything that might lead to this. But on the other hand I do not scruple to tell you that we all love these most unfortunate young people too sincerely to shrink from doing everything that may be in our power to help them. Tell us candidly, and without any scruple or hesitation, what it is you would yourself wish that we should do for them."

This challenge, far from appearing to embarrass the hitherto almost trembling visitor, seemed to inspire her instantly with courage and confidence.

"I will tell you, sir," she replied. "I have already told you all I know concerning them, and I will now tell you what it is I dare to hope from your kindness to beings so utterly helpless, and so miserably unprotected as they are about to be. Let me begin, however, by speaking of myself, as the doing so will tend to remove embarrassment in many ways. I received upon the death of my mother a sum of money which enabled me to purchase an annuity of sixty pounds for my natural life. This income is fully adequate to the supply of all my wants, and I possess, moreover, a small house in Falmouth, a couple of rooms in which will suffice for my own accommodation, and the rent of the remainder will assist my income. I have said thus much to prevent the pitying kindness of your hearts from being wasted upon any thought of me. In reply to your frank question, sir, as to what I would wish you to do for the unfortunate young people for whom you have already done so much, I frankly answer that I wish—nay that I dare venture to hope—that you will extend to them all the personal protection which circumstances may enable you to

bestow. Mr. Rixley set off this morning upon a water excursion, leaving orders that supper should be prepared for him against his return this evening. It will be my office, as usual, to wait upon him at table, and I expect that he will take that opportunity of explaining to me what it is his precise purpose to do respecting the children. He has already informed me that he intends to leave the Warren House to-morrow morning, and that it is his purpose to leave me sufficient credit at the Falmouth bank to enable me to keep house, and provide for them as I have already done since the death of their mother. Some distinct and specific instructions on the subject of his unfortunate son I also expect to receive from him, and my earnest prayer to you, sir, is that whatever funds are left at my disposal you will take the management of them, and do the best you can for the interest and protection of both these most innocent and unfortunate creatures."

Mr. Bolton remained silent for a minute or two after she had ceased speaking, and then said, "Your request, Mrs. Lambert,

has so much that is vague, and yet so much that is important in it, that my reply must” and here the good man again paused, as if doubtful of what he ought to say ; but presently added, “ of necessity be vague also. I can make no promise more specific than that I will do all that may be in my power to serve them.

“ But surely,” he continued, “ in the case of his son he will make his intentions known by a personal communication with himself? William must be, if I mistake not, nearly seventeen years of age. He looks even more, but I well remember that he has always been remarkably tall, and in every way advanced beyond his years. But even at seventeen he surely ought not to be treated as a mere child, and left in the care of his nurse. It is evident, Mrs. Lambert, from the position in which Mr. Rixley proposes to leave you here, that you are still likely to have considerable influence over him, and I trust you will exert it for the purpose of preventing this cruel injustice. William Rixley has great abilities. Not only has he learnt everything that it was in my power to

teach with more brilliant rapidity than I have ever before witnessed, but he has on many occasions shewn unmistakable symptoms of a noble spirit, and a highly susceptible sense of honour. I earnestly advise you not to let his father depart leaving orders that this boy should be placed as usher in a country school. It is utterly impossible to conceive any situation less suited to his temperament. I think it would kill him, Mrs. Lambert! For Heaven's sake do not let this unnatural father set off upon this project of marriage till he has conversed with his son upon the nature of his future career!"

Mrs. Lambert listened to all this with the most respectful attention, but her complexion changed from pale to red before she answered it.

At length she said, "I beseech you, sir, not to judge of my wish and will to obey you strictly upon every point concerning which your kindness and compassion will lead you to bestow your invaluable advice, by what I am going to say in answer to your present proposal. But in order that you should understand me, it is necessary that

you should be told that, till yesterday, this unfortunate boy has been left in total ignorance of the miserable circumstances of his birth. Till yesterday he believed his mother to have been his father's lawful wife. I was present when his unfeeling father told him in the most abrupt and brutal manner the disgraceful truth, and never can I forget the terrible effect which this truth produced on the unhappy boy. Rage and—can we wonder at it—hatred also flashed from that bright and youthful eye. Do not, I conjure you, Mr. Bolton! Do not insist upon my again bringing this father and son together face to face! Most solemnly do I assure you that knowing the father's reckless brutality as I now know it, and having witnessed the vehement emotion of the son as I saw it then, I dare not risk making myself the agent for procuring such a meeting. Wait, sir! wait till the first dreadful shock is over, and then, if circumstances should seem to render it desirable that they should meet at all, the danger of their doing so may be less."

Mr. Bolton listened to her gently, and

with great attention, but when she had finished he shook his head in a way that very plainly shewed he did not agree with her.

"Mrs. Lambert," he said, "I must frankly tell you that I think you wrong. You are evidently terrified at the idea of their meeting, from fearing that some personal violence might arise between them, from one side or the other. But trust me there is a good deal of feminine weakness in this fear. Nay! do not look ashamed of it! Your spirits must have been dreadfully shaken during your late interviews with this hateful man, and we can scarcely wonder that very wild fears for the future may mix with more substantial ones. But I really believe that if you will consider the subject dispassionately you will agree with me in thinking that this young man ought to see and converse with his father before this projected marriage takes place. It may be too late afterwards."

"That is true, sir, very true!" replied the pale and almost ghastly-looking woman, in an accent of deep respect; for the sudden flush which the idea of a meeting between the father and son had sent to her face very

speedily passed away, and left her as pale as ever.

"I have not seen poor William since I carried in breakfast to himself and his sister in the school-room this morning, but I will now return to the house, and, if he is not gone out upon one of his rambles, I will tell him exactly what you say. I am sure there is no person whose opinion he will be so likely to listen to as yourself."

"The sooner you seek for him with this object the better," rejoined the worthy clergyman; "and therefore I will now wish you good morning; but not without assuring you that I justly appreciate the motives which have induced you to pay us this visit."

"I will go, sir: I will go immediately," she replied. "Let me only add one word for the poor friendless girl who is to be consigned to my protection, but whom I love too sincerely to hazard her happiness, and her respectability, by taking charge of. Her fate, by her father's statement, is still very uncertain. Should he have no male heir it is his purpose—and if I understood him rightly he made his will with this object—for this friendless

girl to inherit his large property. Such being his intention, it is impossible to doubt that it must be his intention, also, immediately to make such a provision for her as may enable any person who takes charge of her to provide suitably for her home and her education. I have already explained with sufficient clearness why I cannot be that person. But you, sir! You and your excellent lady! I dare not dictate to you, but should you when I have withdrawn myself to the obscurity which my degraded condition demands, should you then find this dear child wholly unfriended, yet rich enough to insure those who befriend her from loss, may I not hope that wholly friendless she will not be permitted to remain?"

"Be very sure, Mrs. Lambert, that both my wife and myself appreciate your motives in this application to us. In my soul I believe that they do you honour; but you must not insist upon an immediate answer from either of us. Give us time to talk the matter over together, and I think it very likely that your view of the case may be adopted by us. But at present I will pledge

myself to nothing, Mrs. Lambert. You will doubtless have a final conversation with your master before he leaves the Warren House, and the result of this may enable us to decide upon the degree of assistance which we may have it in our power to offer you."

This was too reasonable to be controverted, and the unhappy woman took her leave with assurances of the deepest gratitude for the unmerited kindness with which her terrible narrative had been received.

CHAPTER XII.

It is needless to follow the wretched Mrs. Lambert through all the hours of that dreadful day. There were moments during the course of it in which she could remember nothing but the sort of phosphoric brightness which still rested on her recollections of her first years of union with the man who now so recklessly threw her from him as an idle toy, no longer possessing the power of amusing him. But if there were moments given to the memory of the delusions which formerly surrounded her, there were long hours bestowed upon the recollection of the scenes of yesterday, and the preponderance of the latter, over the former, was in accurate, and

very natural proportion to the recent freshness of the one, and the blighted and blasted memory of the other.

But it is indeed needless to follow all this, and scenes less visionary have now to be related, which must necessarily throw into the shade all the useless regrets of the sinning, but more sinned against, Almeria Lambert.

* * * *

Poor Helen had passed very nearly the entire day alone.

William had left her for the solitary walk which he had predicted would be so useful to him ; and Mrs. Lambert had, in many ways, too much to do to permit her giving more than a few moments at a time to Helen ; so that long before her father had re-entered the Warren House after his lengthened excursion along the coast, she had quietly crept to her little distant bed-room, said her prayers, gone to bed, and fallen asleep.

William returned an hour or two before his father, and, though looking pale and miserable, he accepted the supper Mrs. Lambert had prepared for him, but not till she had assured him that his father was not

in the house; for the poor boy seemed to dread the sight of him.

"I would rather go supperless to bed, Sarah Lambert, than run the risk of meeting him!" said he, with something very like the shudder of abhorrence passing over him.

"There is no danger of that, my dear boy," she replied, in the tone of iron composure with which she habitually concealed every emotion too strong to be safely made manifest. "Your father intends leaving home to-morrow; at least an hour before your usual time of rising. He is going to be married, you know! He is going to visit the lady he is in love with! I have told you that, already, William, and you may be therefore very sure that he will not delay setting off upon so agreeable a commission at all longer than he can help. So you have only to keep in your room, my dear boy, till about six o'clock in the morning, and then you may come down stairs without any fear whatever of meeting him."

"Till six o'clock in the morning?" replied William. "Very well! And now then, good night, dear old friend! Nobody

in the whole world, I believe, ever loved me excepting that angel woman who taught me to call her mother, my pretty Helen, who ought to have been my sister, but who shall never have the shame of calling me brother, and yourself, dear Sarah! Good night!"

And having said these words with very evident emotion, he pressed a silent kiss upon the forehead of his nurse, and left her.

He had evidently been much more strongly affected by all that had happened during the last twenty-four hours than his sister had been, and it is therefore by no means extraordinary if he did not sleep quite so soundly.

Mr. Rixley returned to the Warren House very punctually at the hour when he was expected, and it was soon evident that he came fully prepared to do honour to the supper he had bespoken. He both ate and drank, heartily, and when he had finished his meal, but not till then, he invited Mrs. Lambert to sit down with him, saying, "It will be better, Goody, to say all that there is left for me to say to you, to-night; for there is nothing bores me so much as

having anything to do in the business line, when I have got to set off full speed in the morning. However, I believe I have already told you nearly all that it is necessary for you to know. I have left an order at the Falmouth Bank which will enable you to receive fifty pounds quarterly for the maintenance of yourself and Helen. You seem to wince, my beautiful Almeria? But this is quite enough I promise you, and most decidedly I shall allow no more. You must remember, if you please, that the chances are at least a thousand to one against Miss Helen's inheriting the Beauchamp property, and you may depend upon it she will hear of me, should I be sufficiently unlucky to want her as an heir; and in the meantime I strongly advise you, for her sake, never to breathe a word to her, or to anybody, respecting this very improbable contingency. As to that detestable giant of a boy," he continued, "I have already told him, and you too, what I intend him for. Take care, mother Lambert, that with as little delay as possible you make an usher of him. There are lots of

schools—free schools, and tight schools—in Devonshire and Cornwall, both, where a single word from his dear friend Parson Bolton would get him admitted immediately; and that the said Parson Bolton may not have the disgrace of standing Godfather to a *sans culotte*, this order upon Kingwood's bank will not only pay your first quarter, but serve to fit you all out in the independent line. And now, good night, old lady! This may probably be the last time that you and I shall be *tête-à-tête* together, and my farewell advice to you is not to trouble yourself, or indulge yourself in any romantic love fit for that gawky boy, for take my word for it you will only be disappointed."

The master paused, but the servant uttered no syllable in reply; she only raised her eyes, and looked at him.

He returned the look, and laughed.

"Yes, yes! Mrs. Lambert," he resumed, "I understand your great Greek eyes perfectly. You think I am jealous of the hobbydehoy, but you were never more mistaken in your life. As far as my peace of

mind is concerned, I give you my word of honour you might bestow your mature affections upon every boy in the parish, if you liked it, without causing me any Othello-like sensations whatever. I speak wholly and solely for your own use and benefit, because I happen to know that ladies who are no longer in their *première jeunesse* are rather apt to fall in love with gentlemen who are. You understand French, you know, so I need not explain myself farther."

A little interval—a very little interval—elapsed before Mrs. Lambert spoke, and then she only said, very quietly, "Thank you, sir. I am quite sure that you intend that what you say shall be useful to me, and I think it is very likely, in one way or another, that it may be so. But you forget, sir, how late it is, and I have not finished my packing yet, for I did not know how much linen you would choose to take with you?"

"*All!* you foolish woman! *ALL!* What should I leave linen here for? For tinder? Or do you think it might be convenient to help out Master William's equipment before

he takes possession of his ushership, and so save you a little stitching, Mrs. Sarah? and make him look, perhaps, a little more like a gentleman than he ever did yet, eh?"

"No, sir, not that," she replied, "only I don't know what to do about making room for it. If you take all your things, sir, I must look about for a larger box."

"Very well! look away, then," he replied, "I dare say you will find lots in the store-room. I have got to pack my writing-desk before I go to bed, so bring me my glass of white wine negus, and then be off."

Having said this, he lighted a cigar, which he smoked while she cleared the table, and obeyed his command that she should place his desk, which was deposited on a distant table, upon the one before him. When she had done this, he nodded his head and mumbled "Good night!" without, however, removing his cigar; but before she had closed the door of the room after her, he remembered his negus, and called out, "I say, Lambert! don't forget my negus." In

answer to which she replied "No, sir," but without re-entering the room.

On reaching the kitchen she found the faithful factotum Rebecca Watkins still there, though it was considerably later than her usual time of leaving the house. "How comes it that you are here still, Rebecca?" said she. "I thought you were going when I took in my master's supper."

"And so I was going," she replied, "But just as I was passing the bottom of the stairs to go out, who should I see coming down but Master William, looking so unaccountable pale, that I believe I started outright at the sight of him, and that made him smile, poor young gentleman, but looking for all the world like a ghost all the time. And then I asked him if I could do anything for him, or get anything for him to take, seeing that he looked so poorly, and his answer was that he would not trouble me, but that he really was going into the cellar to draw a tumbler of beer, for that he was so remarkable thirsty after his walk, that he did not think he could get to sleep without it. And thereupon I offered to draw it for him, but this

he would not hear of, upon no account. I tried to take the tumbler he had brought down stairs with him out of his hand, but he would not let me have it, and seeing he was so determined, I gave it up, but I was determined on my side that I would not go home till I had told you how ill I thought he was looking, that in case you heard him moving in the night you might go to him. But I knew it would vex him, like, if he thought I was watching him, and I, therefore, crept back into the kitchen and shut the door, so that he could not see me, and then I do believe that I fell asleep in the chair I sat down upon, for I never heard him go up again."

"I think he was only tired, Rebecca," replied Mrs. Lambert, "and there is no great wonder in that, for I know he has been taking a very long walk to-day. However, I shall be sure to remember what you have told me, and take care to look after him if he should be unwell."

"Now, then, I shall go away easy," replied Rebecca, "but, upon my word, I tell you no more than the truth when I say he looked

ill, for I don't know that I ever see'd a young lad look so deadly pale in my life."

"I hope you will find him looking better when you come to-morrow, Rebecca, but you will do no good by staying any longer now, for I would not have him disturbed on any account. Nothing that anybody could do for him would do him as much good as a sound night's rest."

"Good nights," were then again exchanged between them, and they parted, Rebecca Watkins going to her home, and Mrs. Lambert to the school-room, where she sat down to meditate deliberately, as she told herself, during a few uninterrupted moments, on all that had happened to her during the last eight and forty hours.

If the steadiness of her deliberation might have been judged of by the steadiness of her demeanour during the next quarter of an hour, it was steady enough, for not only was she as pale as marble but as motionless too. Apparently, however, she gave way to no vehement emotion; she 'shed no tear, she breathed no sigh,' but at the end of that quiet, or, at any rate, motionless in-

terval, she suddenly roused herself, as if then recollecting for the first time since she had left her master's presence, that he had commanded her to do many things which were still undone; she got up from the chair on which she had placed herself, and having for a moment closely pressed her aching forehead with her hand, she seemed suddenly to shake off the sort of dreamy stupefaction which had been creeping upon her, and employed herself in making the negus which had been ordered; having done which she carried it to the parlour and placed it on the table at which her master was still sitting, arranging sundry papers in his writing-desk.

He took no notice whatever of her entrance, but when she was in the act of leaving the room, he said, "What have you been so devilish long about? Are my things packed, Lambert? I am going to bed this moment."

"Everything shall be ready," she replied, and closed the door behind her. But everything was not quite ready yet, for she had to go into his bed-room before he entered it.

Many of the things which he had ordered to be packed were still there, and it was with a hurried step that she now mounted the stairs to his apartment. She succeeded, however, in accomplishing all she had to do there before he entered the room, but met him on the stairs as she descended with her apron full of various articles which she was about to put in his travelling trunks.

"You have not finished yet?" he exclaimed impatiently. "Upon my soul, Lambert, it is quite time that I should give you up, for you are grown into a cursedly tedious old drone."

"I shall have plenty of time, sir," she replied, as she passed him.

And so she had, and she faithfully kept her promise of having everything he had ordered, neatly packed; and then she too went to bed.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT her usual early hour on the following morning the faithful Rebecca arrived at the Warren House, and let herself into the back kitchen by means of the key which had for years been confided to her in order to enable her to make her frequent exits and entrances without troubling the scanty household.

As usual, too, she performed her morning duty of making the fire and putting on the kettle, and then repaired to the parlour in which the master of the house had supped on the preceding evening, and began to put it in order for his breakfast.

But before she could make the room look tidy she had rather more to do than usual, for the carpet was covered on both sides of the chair in which he had sat with fragments

of various written papers, of which it seemed that he had disembarrassed his writing-desk which he had left standing on the table exactly opposite his chair.

Having carefully removed all these minute fragments, and thereby restored the room to its ordinarily neat aspect, she prepared to lay the cloth for breakfast, for she knew that "the master" was to set off early on his journey to London.

But she felt almost afraid to move the writing-desk lest it might have been expressly left there by its choleric owner in order to be ready for his further use in the morning; and having stood meditating on this doubtful point for a moment, she laid the still-folded cloth on the table determined to consult the housekeeper before she ventured to remove the very handsome and important looking desk.

She did however all she could in the way of preparation that did not interfere with this prudent resolution; she took away an empty tumbler which stood upon the table, removed every particle of dust with her checked apron, and then placed the tea-

tray with pretty nearly all that was needful for breakfast beside the table-cloth, in order to be perfectly ready to obey the orders of Mrs. Lambert as soon as she should receive them.

Nor did she wait long for the appearance of this important functionary, for she entered the room almost at the moment that she had completed these preliminary operations.

"Oh, goodness! I am so glad you are come down, Mrs. Lambert!" exclaimed Rebecca, pointing to the table, "for I was come to a stand-still, because I did not know whether I ought to move that grand-looking box, or not. You know that it always stands yonder upon that table from the time master comes into the house, till he goes out of it again, and I am sure I don't know if he would choose that anybody should put hands upon it besides himself."

"You go on laying the breakfast, and never mind about the box," replied Mrs. Lambert, seating herself in a chair near the door. "Only take everything else off the table, she added.

"And so I have, Mrs. Lambert. I have

taken away a dirty tumbler, and the plate that it stood upon, tea-spoon and all, and I have swept away lots of bits of paper both from the table, and the carpet round about, but I would not do any more till I had got your orders."

"Well, Rebecca, then I think you had better leave the desk where it is and lay the cloth at the other end of the table," was the reply.

Rebecca immediately set to work to obey her, and while she was thus employed, Mrs. Lambert said, "Have you seen Master William, Rebecca? He is always stirring before this time, but I have neither seen nor heard him."

"Nor I either, Mrs. Lambert," replied Rebecca. "But I am not a bit surprised at it," she continued, "for I am positive sure that the poor young gentleman was not well when I saw him just before he went to bed last night. You know I told you so, Mrs. Lambert, didn't I?"

"Yes you did, Rebecca, but I can't say that I minded you much, for I knew that he had been taking one of his over-long

walks, and that was quite enough to make him look tired. However, I'll go and see if anything is the matter with him."

And that is just what I think you ought to do," was the rejoinder, "for I won't believe that he is right well till I see him again, and he tells me so."

"Finish what you are about, then," said Mrs. Lambert, leaving the room as she spoke, "and I will come back again with news of William, directly."

She kept her word, for she did come directly, and in as short a time as it was well possible for her to have mounted the stairs, and come down again. "Ill!" she exclaimed, as she re-entered the parlour, "It does not seem very likely that he should be ill. But he is neither in his bed nor in his room, Rebecca, and the strangest thing of all is that his window, which opens upon the top of the porch is thrown up, and that he is gone that way is clear, for one of his sheets is made fast to one of the posts of his little bed, which he has drawn close to the window, and it is plain that he has let himself down by the help of it."

"But what in the wide world could have made him do such a trick?" replied Rebecca. "What should he have run away for in that fashion, Mrs. Lambert?"

"Because his father had used him brutally!" replied Mrs. Lambert, covering her face with her hands.

"Poor boy! Poor boy!" responded Rebecca. "To think that such a fine, handsome, kind-spoken young gentleman should hazard his dear precious young life for that!"

"Gracious God, no!" replied the other vehemently. "I don't believe any such thing. There is nothing in the whole world so unlikely! But we are two fools for being frightened about him, Rebecca Watkins. I'll bet you what you please, that he is only gone upon another of his long walks. He has always been as mad about walking as his father about sailing. . . . And here comes the chaise for my master! Don't say anything to anybody, Rebecca, about William's getting out of the window. It will only give people a notion that he is a wild sort of boy, and that he is not. Mind what I tell you! He is

the very best and gentlest human being that ever God made. He might do many wild madcap things in sport, but that is the very worst of him."

At this moment, the old servant, who was gardener, shoe-black, and head boatman of the establishment, presented himself at the door. "Is master ready?" said he.

"He has not had his breakfast yet, at any rate," replied Rebecca, "so the chaise must wait his pleasure, as, of course, it ought. But if he is late it is not our fault, for we have got everything ready for him."

"Do go up to his door, John, will you?" said Mrs. Lambert. "Go to his door, and tell him that the chaise is come."

The man hastened to obey her, and mounted the stairs, not exactly with a light step, but certainly not with a slow one, the two women remaining below, too much occupied, as it seemed, with the strange escapade of William to enable them to think much of anything else.

But their talk on this subject was very speedily interrupted by the return of John, who rushed down the stairs with a step as

rapid as that with which he would have descended from the top-mast to announce the sight of land after a calm, though nothing could be less alike than the countenance with which he would have announced that joyous fact, and that with which he now addressed the two women who were awaiting his return.

"He is dead!" he exclaimed, in an accent which would have carried terror to the stoutest heart. "He is dead, and as cold as a stone!"

Rebecca Watkins uttered a loud scream, while Mrs. Lambert sunk into a chair in perfect silence, but looking herself as pale as the corpse her fellow-servant described.

"But, maybe, he is not outright dead, Mrs. Lambert?" said Rebecca. "Maybe he is only swooned away like, out of an accident? Didn't we ought to send right away for the doctor, Mrs. Lambert?"

"To be sure we ought!" responded both the other servants; "and that without losing another moment!" added Mrs. Lambert.

"Mr. Foster will be here in the twinkling of an eye, I'll answer for him," exclaimed John, seizing upon his hat, and darting out

of the house without waiting for further orders.

"But mercy on me!" exclaimed Rebecca, trembling in every limb, "it is not right for us to stay down here, doing nothing, is it, Mrs. Lambert? Didn't we ought to go up stairs, together, both of us, to see if there is any good to be done? How can we be sure that John mightn't have blundered? Didn't we ought to go up, Mrs. Lambert?"

"Most certainly we ought, Rebecca," replied the other with greatly more composure; though she too still looked very pale, "the only objection to our going together," she added, "is our having to leave the house-door open. It won't do, you know, to keep the doctor waiting when he comes."

"Well, then, what can we do?" said Rebecca, "I wouldn't go up first by my own self for all the whole world, and I don't suppose you would either? What a pity it is that Master William should be out of the way just at this moment!"

"It is, indeed!" replied Mrs. Lambert, with a sigh, "I would give a great deal to

have him by me at this moment. Not that I mind about going up, Rebecca. I will go up directly, if you will promise to bring up the doctor the very minute he comes. You must not keep him here talking, remember, because if any good can be done, of course it must be done directly. If he really is dead it must have been in a fit, and the only chance will be to bleed him immediately."

"Yes, sure," replied the still shaking Rebecca, "that is what will be done, I'll engage for it; and don't you be feared that I shou'd keep back the doctor from doing it."

Having received this reiterated promise, Mrs. Lambert left the kitchen, and repaired with a slow, but perfectly steady step to contemplate the dead body of the man whom she had once, and that at no very distant date, loved with a devotedness of affection but very rarely met with in any class.

But even then she lost not that wonderful power of self-command, which had enabled her for so many years to retain an aspect of perfect tranquillity in a situation, which, to

most women, would have rendered the attempt to do so absolutely impossible. She now entered her master's bed-room with her usual steady step, and, having reached the bed, stood gazing on the lifeless form, which lay stretched upon it, with a degree of solemnity which precluded the possibility of accusing her of anything like indifference, or lightness of feeling, but which spoke at the same time the most perfect self-possession and calmness.

The man who had so lately been the personification of everything that was vehement, and wilful, now lay stretched before her in a way that proclaims the idle nothingness of all human passion more impressively, and more convincingly, than all the sage, and all the priest have taught.

The deep philosophy of the lesson was not lost on the half-educated woman. She could not tremble, and totter, and faint, as the majority of women of her own rank might have done; but she felt that she stood face to face with the greatest mystery which has hitherto been revealed to us throughout all the startling wonders of creation!

Where was that spirit now, which had possessed the skill of seeming to be one thing, while it was another? Was it gone where it would be for ever stripped of that power? And would it henceforward inhabit regions more fitted to its real nature than to its assumed one? Or was there in sin a quality, analogous to weight in matter, which took it, and its belongings, *of necessity*, and by a primal law of nature, down, deeper, and deeper still, to a lower stage, a lower department of Nature's work-shop?

Almeria Lambert had certainly been taught, after a fashion, to speak French, and to play on the pianoforte; but, nevertheless, she was a very ignorant woman; and when her fancy once set sail, she had neither rudder nor compass to help her, and during her fits of speculation, would often have been at a loss to have told either which way she was going, or by what means she hoped to obtain the goal she had in view.

But on the present occasion, at least, the vagueness of these imaginings was certainly beneficial to her, for however wild the whirlwind of thought which seemed to drive her

on, it had, decidedly, the beneficial effect of taking her from the ghastly scene before her, or, at any rate, of enabling her to contemplate it with infinitely less of mere feminine weakness than Rebecca Watkins could have done.

Mrs. Lambert, however, was not long left to her solitary meditations beside the body of her late master; for John had been a fleet messenger, and Mr. Foster obeyed the startling summons with all the promptness which such a summons is sure to produce in a neighbourhood too scantily populated for exciting incidents of any kind to abound.

Moreover, the really kind-hearted village doctor no sooner heard old John's panting announcement that "Squire Rixley had died of a fit during the night," than his thoughts flew to the children, both of whom he had ushered into the world, and both of whom seemed to him, as well as to all others, to have so wonderfully little claim upon the kindness of any one in it.

When, therefore, the grey-headed messenger added to his intelligence, "the house-keeper's best respects, and hopes that his

honour would be pleased to come over to see if anything could be done in case the poor gentleman should not be dead outright," Mr. Foster seized his hat and strode off to the Warren House without a moment's delay, but with a much stronger feeling of interest for the children than for Mr. Rixley himself, whether he were dead or alive.

As to this latter question, the first glance of the experienced doctor's eye settled it, as far as he was concerned; and the first words he spoke as completely removed all doubt from those around.

"There would be no use in attempting to bleed him! His blood will never flow again," said Mr. Foster, gently laying his hand on the shoulder of Mrs. Lambert, who was still standing beside the corpse, with a countenance that had more the expression of deep reverie and meditation than of vehement emotion.

"You had better come down stairs, Mrs. Lambert," said he. "I am sure the poor children must want you to be with them at such a moment, and you can do no good

here! But where *is* William? Does he know that his father is dead?"

"We can't find Master William, sir," said Rebecca Watkins, who, together with old John, had followed the doctor up-stairs.

"Master William, sir, must have set off upon his usual morning walk long before old John went up to call my master," said Mrs. Lambert, "and therefore, of course, he can know nothing about it."

"Yes, indeed, poor young gentleman," added Rebecca, "it is likely enough that by this time he may be miles off; bird-shooting, may be, as he often is by times in the morning. And it was plain that he was more than usual early to-day, 'cause we know that he got out of the window of his room to prevent disturbing anybody."

Mrs. Lambert knit her brows, and said hastily, "Nonsense! That is no proof that he was out earlier than usual, for it is what he has been in the habit of doing for years."

"No, sure," said John, with a look of astonishment. "Well, now! to think of my never finding that out, and I coming so constant almost before daybreak!"

"Well, well, his being absent now is of no great consequence; for he could do no good to anybody here," returned Mr. Foster. "Let us think of poor Miss Helen. I suppose she is asleep still, Mrs. Lambert? But I should like to see her, if you please, as soon as she gets up. I think, the best thing will be for her to come to our house directly; it will be less dismal for her, poor child, than staying here; and I suppose we shall soon learn what is to become of her afterwards. But I don't believe that there is anybody in the whole county that knows anything about Mr. Rixley's family. It is just possible that his bankers at Falmouth may, but that we shall easily find out; and if he has ever made a will, I think it is more likely to be with them than with anybody else. But I suppose, upon this point, you know nothing, Mrs. Lambert?"

"I certainly cannot say that I *know* anything about his will, sir, except that I have heard him say that he had made one," replied Mrs. Lambert.

"I am glad to hear it," returned Mr.

Foster. "If we find a will, it will, doubtless, make everything easy."

This conversation did not take place, however, as the parties stood round the dead man's bed; but Mr. Foster, having seen that Rebecca Watkins and old John had recently covered the body, drawn the curtains, opened the window, and closed the door, had led the way down stairs, and seated himself in the dining-parlour.

"Let me see poor Helen before I go," said he, as soon as he had received this agreeable information respecting the will; "and as soon as I have spoken to her, I will myself ride over to Falmouth, and inquire at the bankers' whether they are in possession of any document that may be of importance to these poor friendless orphans. But I should like to see poor Helen first."

"I will go to her immediately, sir," replied Mrs. Lambert, turning to leave the room as she spoke; but ere she had reached the door, the unconscious Helen appeared at it.

"Is papa gone, Sarah Lambert?" she said, meeting her nurse in the doorway, and

before she had become aware that Mr. Foster was in the room.

But before Mrs. Lambert could answer, the friendly doctor had hastened forward, and, taking her hand, led her to a chair, and placed her in it.

Helen looked surprised, but, nevertheless, greeted him with her usual friendly cordiality. "I am always glad to see you, Mr. Foster," she said, with a smile, "provided you do not come because somebody is sick, and I don't believe that anybody is sick now. Where is William, Sarah Lambert?"

"Do not be alarmed because you do not see him, my dear Helen," said Mr. Foster, "for I dare say he is perfectly well, though he does not happen to be here. But I am very sorry he is not here, too, for I have sad news to tell you, my dear, and I know it would be a comfort to you to have your brother with you, and I shall be very glad when he comes home. But I cannot wait for that before I tell you what has happened, for it is quite proper you should hear of it immediately."

These words, vague as they were, prepared

her, as the friendly speaker intended they should, for something both sad and sudden; and this was all by which he thought it necessary to preface the words, "Your father, my dear young lady, is dead! He has, apparently, died suddenly during the night; probably from apoplexy."

"My father dead?" she exclaimed, suddenly changing colour; "and where is William? Sarah Lambert! tell me where William is gone? Pray let me see him directly."

"You shall see him, my dear child, as soon as ever he returns to the house," replied Mrs. Lambert; "but I do not think that will be for some hours yet, for I fancy he has set off quite early upon one of his long walks."

This answer seemed to satisfy Helen, or, at least, to silence her; but it appeared to surprise Mr. Foster, for he said, "How very strange it was, that he should have set off without seeing his father, almost at the very moment that the chaise which is now at the door must have been expected to take him from home. He had not quarrelled with his

father, had he? If he had, poor lad, he will be dreadfully sorry when he comes home, and finds what has happened."

"Quarrelled!" said Mrs. Lambert, indignantly, "Oh, dear no, sir! nothing could be further from his thoughts than that, poor dear boy. But my master never chose that anybody should take leave of him when he went away, or make any fuss of any kind when he came back; and, therefore, there was nothing at all extraordinary in William's setting off to take a walk this fine morning."

"No, indeed," returned Mr. Foster; "in that case, he can neither blame himself nor be blamed by anybody. I was going, my dear Miss Helen," continued the kind-hearted apothecary, "to do my very best to persuade you to go home with me to my house; but now I will say nothing about it, as I can perfectly well understand that you would not like to be out of the way when your brother returned. I must go now, for there is more than one sick person in the parish expecting me; but I shall call again before I go to Falmouth, and then I hope he will be returned, and that he will join with

me in endeavouring to persuade you that it will be much better for you, just at present, to come down and stay a little while with Mrs. Foster and the girls, than to remain here."

The only thing which poor Helen clearly understood at that moment was, that Mr. Foster meant to be kind to her; and it was probably more the grateful feeling which this idea produced than anything approaching grief for the death of her father, which drew forth the tears which now filled her eyes.

"You are very kind!" she said, with rather an hysterical sob.

"Take care of her, Mrs. Lambert," said the apothecary, kindly; "but that I am very sure you will do, without my telling you; and I say, Mrs. Lambert," he continued, in a whisper, "don't let there be any nonsense about her going to look at her father. She is quite hysterical enough already, without that."

Mrs. Lambert respectfully promised to obey his instructions, and the friendly apothecary took his leave.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE sudden death of the master of a house, and the father of a family, can never occur without plunging all the survivors connected with him into a state of great agitation and excitement. Whether his loss be lamented with affection, or deplored only as the breaking up of domestic ties, it must necessarily be the prelude to many painful scenes.

It may be fairly hoped that few men die leaving so little trace of affectionate regret behind them as Mr. Rixley of the Warren House; but on the other hand it may be fairly hoped, likewise, that few men die leaving those to whom they had given existence, and who depended on them for the support of it, so completely at a loss to guess what was to become of them.

In the present case, however, it was only on poor Helen that this desolate feeling fell with all its weight. Had she ever loved her father, had she ever been permitted to love him from the hour of her birth to that of his death, this dismal feeling of desolation could not have fallen so heavily on her ; for then her thoughts would have had more than one direction in which to turn themselves, and their heavy gloom would have been softened into tenderness, and relieved by tears.

But nothing in the slightest degree resembling tears now came to the relief of Helen, as she thought of her father. She remained in the chair in which Mr. Foster had placed her, perfectly motionless.

Rebecca stood looking at her with a pitying eye, her arms a-kimbo, and dolorously shaking her head ; old John had followed the doctor with the civil intention of opening the house-door for him ; but before the house-door was reached, Mrs. Lambert called him back.

“ I want you immediately, John,” said she, earnestly, “ I want you to go, without a

moment's delay, to Mr. Bolton; tell him what has happened, and beg him to have the great kindness to come here directly."

The old man moved off with a step rapid enough to prove that he, too, thought this was the most proper measure that could be taken; and when he was gone Mrs. Lambert went to Helen, and drawing a chair close to her, sat down, and passing one hand round her waist, parted the hair upon her drooping forehead, and said, "Look up, my darling child! You must recover yourself, Helen! You must not let this terrible event overpower you so completely! I hope and trust that your good friend, Mr. Bolton, will be here directly. The seeing him will, of course, be a great comfort to you, but I should not like for him to see you so perfectly miserable as you look now, for it would be enough to make him despair of being useful to you."

"Where is William, Sarah Lambert? Where is my dear, dear brother? I should not look miserable if he were here. It is William I am thinking about and nothing else," replied Helen, in vehement agitation.

"Depend upon it, my dear child, William will be here again in a few hours, so do not make yourself miserable about that."

"Do you really think so, my dear, darling Sarah Lambert?" returned Helen, suddenly throwing her arms round the neck of her nurse, and eagerly kissing her. "If your words do but come true, Mrs. Lambert, you shall find that whatever happens to us I shall try to behave as I ought to do. If William and I are not parted, I am sure I can bear anything. And you, too, Sarah Lambert! I must not be parted from you, my dear dear nurse. And if we three are together, we will never mind about wanting money, or anything of that sort, for I am quite able to work, and so is William, and so are you. It is quite impossible that anything very terrible can come to us if we are all left together."

"Your good and wise friend Mr. Bolton will tell us all that we ought to do," replied Mrs. Lambert, "and you, and William too, will, I am quite sure, be always ready and willing to do whatever he says ought to be done. I am sure we can neither of us doubt

his kindness to William, for he really seems to think him the very best, as well as the very cleverest boy he ever knew in the whole course of his life. I have heard him say so over and over again, Helen."

"And so have I, Sarah Lambert," replied Helen, with energy; "and it was true, too, and I don't believe he ever will see any one equal to him if he lives a hundred years. But where is he, Mrs. Lambert? Where is he? Oh! his absence at this moment is dreadful!"

"It is certainly very unfortunate, my dear child," replied Mrs. Lambert, whose perfect calmness of manner formed a strong contrast to the vehement emotion manifested by Helen; "very unfortunate!" she repeated, "and yet, after all, my dear, it is of no great consequence, you are certain of seeing him in an hour or two."

"Oh! if you could but convince me of that!" returned Helen, clasping her hands, "if you could but convince me of that, you would no longer have any reason to complain of my not behaving well!"

"Well then, my darling child!" returned

Mrs. Lambert, fondly kissing her, "you will be everything I wish you to be before the evening. But you must begin to show your intention of behaving well to-night, by eating some breakfast this morning. I should not like for Mr. Bolton to come and find you as pale and as shaking as you are now."

Poor Helen answered nothing, but, dearly as she loved her nurse, she felt greatly relieved by her leaving her quietly alone while she employed herself in preparing the table for breakfast, for then she could indulge herself by placing the back of the chair upon which Mrs. Lambert had been sitting exactly before her, and having crossed her arms upon the top of it, she lent her aching forehead upon them, and, suffering her abundant curls to fall forward, enjoyed for a few moments the comfort of knowing that the tears might flow without being seen by anybody.

The preparations for breakfast meanwhile, went on, and in the course of them, Rebecca Watkins asked the housekeeper if she should now remove the writing-desk, and cover the table, as usual, with the table-cloth.

"No, Rebecca! no!" answered Mrs. Lambert, with some quickness. "Let it remain exactly as it is. The table is large enough. The last thing he ever did was using that desk, and there let it be left till Mr. Bolton comes.

The few minutes which had elapsed since Helen was left to herself, appeared to have been beneficial to her, for when Mrs. Lambert took her by the hand, and led her to the table, she had not only ceased to weep, but she held up her innocent young face to her kind and watchful Sarah Lambert for a kiss, and it was bestowed with a degree of fondness that could scarcely have been greater if it had been given by a mother to her child.

"And you do really think that William will return before the day is over?" said Helen, preparing to eat her breakfast, and at the same time nestling close to the chair in which Mrs. Lambert had placed herself beside her.

"Don't be angry with me, Sarah Lambert," she added, "for plaguing you with the same question so over and over again ;

but nothing does me so much good as hearing you say that you feel *sure* he will be back to night."

"Well then, dearest," replied her indulgent comforter, "I will keep on saying the same words again, and again, and again, till you have got him back again."

Helen turned her beautiful eyes upon her with a look that seemed to speak more gratitude than the promise deserved, but it was not so, if its value was to be estimated by its effect; for when Mrs. Lambert presently repeated with a smile, "He will be back again before night, Helen," the gentle girl really looked as if she only wanted that assurance in order to console her under every possible misfortune—past, present, or future.

Helen and her loving nurse were not left long, however, to either give or receive consolation solely from each other, for considerably before Mrs. Lambert had hoped to see him, Mr. Bolton entered the parlour.

They both rose up to receive him; he looked, good man, not only hurried, but agitated, and, having noticed poor Helen with gentle and paternal kindness, he turned

to her nurse and said, "Let me speak to you alone Mrs. Lambert for a few minutes."

She curtsied her acquiescence, and saying to Helen, "Wait for us here, my dear child, till we come back again," she preceded the clergyman into the school-room.

"This occurrence is frightfully sudden! awfully sudden, Mrs. Lambert! Have you had any reason during the time you have known him, for supposing that Mr. Rixley had any propensity to apoplexy?"

"Unless occasional violence of temper might be so considered, sir, I should certainly say *not*," replied Mrs. Lambert.

"Did any scene of unusual vehemence occur between you after you left us yesterday?" said Mr. Bolton.

"Unusual?" repeated Mrs. Lambert, thoughtfully. "No, sir; I should certainly say not. He remained in his boat for many hours; but I have no reason for thinking that he injured himself in any way by this. On the contrary, he ate a more than usually hearty supper; but he sat up very quietly for more than an hour afterwards, arranging the papers at that writing-desk. When he

went to bed he left it on the table, exactly where you will find it when you re-enter the room, sir, for I have not let anybody touch it since. He told me himself some days ago that his will was in that desk; and it is there, sir, that I hope you will find it."

"It is not I who must look for it, Mrs. Lambert," replied the clergyman. "We must immediately put seals upon all his personal effects; and then take measures, without loss of time, to inform his nearest of kin of his death, and of the state in which all his property here is left."

"Yes, sir," she replied; "that is what I thought must be done; and I trust, for Miss Helen's sake, that it will be you, sir, who will have the kindness to write to his family."

"It may, perhaps, be best that I should do so," he replied. "Meantime, Mrs. Lambert, I would wish that if the late Mr. Rixley was in the habit of employing any attorney in this neighbourhood, that person should be sent to immediately, in order to witness the putting seals upon all receptacles containing papers, money, or plate."

"This shall be done directly, sir," she re-

plied. "Old John will easily find a messenger to ride over to Falmouth to Mr. Lucas. But who is it that must send for him? Would it be asking too much, sir, if I begged of you to take the trouble of writing a line to Mr. Lucas in your own name, desiring him to come to the Warren House?"

"It would be no great trouble, Mrs. Lambert," he replied. "But where is William? I think it would be better that he should write this note.

"Unfortunately, sir, William is not at home," replied Mrs. Lambert."

"Not at home! Where is he, then?" inquired Mr. Bolton.

"I don't know, sir," she replied. "He was gone before I was up this morning, and I suppose he has set off to take one of his long early walks."

"I am sorry for it," returned Mr. Bolton. "I should have wished to speak to him immediately. But it cannot be helped, and we must not waste time by waiting for him. Give me pen and ink and paper, Mrs. Lambert, and I will write at once, not only to Mr. Lucas, but to Mr. Rixley's family also.

I think you told me that he had a brother. Can you give me his address?"

"No, sir, that I certainly cannot," she replied; "and I do not believe that I have ever heard him name it. But I think that if you were to direct your letter to the Rev. Mr. Rixley, Beauchamp Park, *to be forwarded*, I think it could hardly fail to reach his brother."

"But did you not tell me that the family name was Beauchamp?" demanded Mr. Bolton.

"No, sir," she replied; "Rixley is the family name of my late master. He himself took the name of Beauchamp, when he succeeded to the Beauchamp property on the death of his maternal uncle. His brother, therefore, I presume, must still be called Rixley."

"True, true. I will then direct my letter to the Rev. Mr. Rixley," returned Mr. Bolton, preparing to use the writing implements which she had brought him.

"But his daughter and heiress," rejoined Mrs. Lambert, almost in a whisper, as if afraid of interrupting him—"his daughter

and heiress will, of course, take the name of Beauchamp. She will be Miss Beauchamp, of Beauchamp Park."

"Upon my word, Mrs. Lambert," said Mr. Bolton, holding his pen suspended while he spoke to her, "I think you draw your conclusions respecting Helen's heiress-ship from very uncertain authority. I sincerely hope that you have never given her reason to suppose that you have any such idea in your head."

"Never! Mr. Bolton, never!" she replied, with great earnestness. "I should be quite as averse to having any such notion suggested to her as you could be yourself, sir, or, perhaps, more so, for I know better than any other person can do how little dependence can be placed on any statement made by her father. If my master really did make a will, I think it will be found in his writing-desk. But I certainly feel that it is very possible he never made any will at all. Gracious heaven!" she exclaimed, after the silence of a minute or two, "it is *very* possible!" and as she said this she clasped her hands together across her forehead, with a much greater appear-

ance of agitation than she had yet shown. "And if it be so, if it *should* prove so, Mr. Bolton," she added, "what is to become of Miss Helen? She will be worse off, oh! greatly worse off, than she has ever been! Who is there to feed her? Who is there to take care of her? Is she to be indebted for her daily bread to such a one as I am?"

And then, for the first time since old John had announced the death of her late master, the wretched woman shed tears; nay, despite all the self-command on which she so justly prided herself, she wept bitterly; and there was an expression of such deep despair on her pale harassed features, that the kind pastor's heart ached for her. He seemed to forget, for the moment, her own statement of the guilty life which she had for so many years been leading, and to remember nothing but her faithful attachment to the orphan child she had nursed.

"Do not torment yourself, Mrs. Lambert, by fancying a misfortune which certainly, from what you told me yesterday, does not seem probable," said he. "Did you not say that your master had positively stated to you

the fact of his having made his will, and also that he had left his property to his daughter?"

"Most assuredly he did!" she eagerly replied; while her own statement, thus simply repeated to her by Mr. Bolton, seemed to reach her with all the force of incontrovertible authority. "He not only said it," she continued, earnestly, "but I believe in my heart that then, at least, he spoke the truth. But there is something so very dreadful, sir, in the bare possibility of its proving otherwise, that I felt as if I had not strength to bear it! But I not only remember his words, I remember also the dreadful feeling with which they were uttered; and, therefore, it is that I do believe they were said in earnest! If he has made his will—and, thank God! I do believe he *has* made it—it was no love for his sweet innocent child that made him do it. It was only hatred to his brother!"

"This may be so," said the clergyman; "but it will be better for us not to remember it, Mrs. Lambert. You reprobate his hatred for his brother; and yet you seem to be giving way to a similar evil feeling towards

himself. I will not deny," he continued, seeing her dark eye flash with indignation—"I will not deny that he has given you great and terrible cause to dislike him, and to shudder at his name; but it is our duty as Christians, Mrs. Lambert, to conquer all such feelings, and to forget them."

"Forget them!" she replied, again pressing her clasped hands across her forehead. "Forget them! God forbid!"

"Fie, fie!" said Mr. Bolton, shaking his head. "You know not what you say!"

And feeling that this was no moment for reasoning with her, he resumed his pen, and wrote the following letter to "The Rev. Mr. Rixley :"—

CHAPTER XV.

7th September, 18—.

SIR,

It has become my painful duty to announce to you the sudden death, in my parish, of a gentleman, who I am told is your brother. This gentleman, whom for many years I have known as Mr. George Rixley, has been residing, at intervals, during that time, at an old mansion that he has purchased here, known by the name of the "Warren House," he has made himself very little acquainted with the neighbourhood, but I learn from a servant who has lived with him many years, and who seems to know more about him than any one else, that though the name by which he has been

known here was that of his father, it is not the name which now, of right, belongs to him, he having for some years assumed that of Beauchamp, in consequence of inheriting the property of a maternal uncle. I mention these circumstances that there may be no doubt left upon your mind respecting his identity. All other particulars respecting him, and the children he has left, will be more easily explained to you, reverend sir, if you answer this letter, as I presume you will do, in person.

Mrs. Lambert, the housekeeper, to whom I have before alluded, tells me that she has no doubt that her late master left a will, as he has himself, more than once, stated this fact to her. She has even pointed out to me the piece of furniture in which she believes this document is placed. It is a moderate-sized writing-desk, and I shall forthwith have it conveyed to the parsonage house for greater security, where I hope it will be opened by your own hand. It will be desirable, of course, that this should be done as speedily as possible, in case the will, said to be deposited in it, should contain any

instructions respecting his funeral. Should I not be fortunate enough either to see or hear from you before the thirteenth of the current month, the remains of your brother will be interred in Crumpton Churchyard on that day.

I remain, Reverend Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

STEPHEN BOLTON,

Officiating Minister of Crumpton.

Please to address to me,
Crumpton, Cornwall.

Having written this letter, Mr. Bolton read it aloud to Mrs. Lambert, and then sealed and despatched it by a trustworthy messenger to the post-office at Falmouth, together with a note to Mr. Lucas, the attorney, requesting to see him immediately.

Having performed this necessary business, Mr. Bolton proposed returning to Helen, and the housekeeper accompanied him accordingly into the parlour. They found her sitting exactly where they had left her, and on seeing Mr. Bolton re-enter the room, she again rose up, but made no step in

advance to meet him, and in fact looked so miserably ill as to suggest the idea that she was too weak to make the exertion.

"My poor dear Helen!" said the clergyman, taking her hand and replacing her in her chair, "the shock you have received has been too sudden, and too violent for your strength; but you must rouse yourself, my dear child, and not sit thus gloomily meditating upon what has happened. I think, Mrs. Lambert," he continued, "that the best thing I can do will be to take her to the parsonage. You will have a good deal to do here to get everything in good order preparatory to the arrival of Mr. Rixley, who will be here in a day or two, I have no doubt, and it will be better for Helen to remain quietly with us till he comes. You will send down whatever you think she may want, and may feel quite easy about her, for you know she will be well taken care of."

"Thank you, sir, a thousand times for your thoughtful kindness! It will indeed be a great comfort to see her removed from this dismal house," replied Mrs. Lambert.

every feature in her speaking face bearing testimony to her sincerity.

"Helen, dearest!" she continued, taking the hand of the pale girl between both of hers—"Helen! Do you hear the great kindness of Mr. Bolton?"

"Indeed I do hear it," replied Helen, while tears of gratitude started to her eyes, "and I am most grateful for his goodness to me. . . . But, William, Mrs. Lambert? You cannot think I would go away without seeing William, do you?"

"Your coming to us need not prevent your seeing him, Helen," said Mr. Bolton. "I believe the dear boy knows that there is no place where he would be more welcome than at our house—for we all love him. But even if he had any doubt upon the subject, which is not very likely, Mrs. Lambert, you know, can easily make him understand that we are all expecting him, yourself included, Helen. Will not this suffice to make your mind easy on that point?"

Poor Helen looked greatly at a loss how to answer. She certainly did not wish to appear either ungrateful or unreasonable,

and yet it was very evident that the arrangement did not quite please her. For a moment she was silent, and then she said, "If I do not thank you as I ought to do, dear, dear Mr. Bolton! it is not because I do not feel your kindness. But there is something so strangely dreadful in all that has happened since William took leave of me last night, that I don't think anything would do me so much good as the seeing him again the very first moment that he comes home. After I have seen him for one single moment, Mr. Bolton, and that he has kissed me once more, and wished me good night, as he used to do, I would rather go to your house ten thousand times over than stay here, but I *must* just stay to see him first, if you please!"

"No, Helen! No! I must have my way in this," replied Mr. Bolton. "It is not right, my dear child, at least in my opinion it is not right, that you should remain here."

"Now Helen, I am quite sure that you will resist no longer," said Mrs. Lambert.

She spoke this earnestly, and most as-

surely with perfect sincerity; but it was easy, for Mr. Bolton at least, to see that it was not without a bitter pang that the unhappy woman felt the stern necessity of parting with the innocent young creature whom she had so carefully cherished, and so fondly loved. But she remembered that it was she herself who had first pointed out this necessity, and a moment's thought had sufficed to make her deeply thankful that she had pleaded against herself so successfully.

Helen listened respectfully, as she always did, to every suggestion of Mr. Bolton, and after the silence of a moment, she said, "If you think it is better for me, sir, I am ready to go. But somebody will come and tell me when William comes home?"

Mr. Bolton undertook to promise that this should be done, and then her bonnet and shawl being given to her by Mrs. Lambert, the kind clergyman passed her arm under his own, and led her from the Warren House, little thinking that she should never re-enter it again!

* * * *

Nothing could be more truly amiable than the manner in which the orphan girl was received by Mrs. Bolton; and had it not been for the eager wish which still seemed to pursue her for the return of her brother, her young nerves would soon have recovered their tone; but as hour after hour of that long day wore away without bringing him, or any tidings of him, not all the kindness with which she was surrounded could avail to tranquillize her.

At a few minutes before eleven o'clock at night Mrs. Lambert came to the parsonage, but it was only to beg that the family would not sit up any longer, as she now considered it as quite impossible that William should return that night.

It was painful to witness the agitation with which Helen listened to this announcement, and the more so, because those who felt this friendly pain had not a word to say in the way of hope or consolation to her.

This most ill-timed, and unfortunate absence was indeed so perfectly unaccountable in every way, that neither of those kind friends who stood around the sobbing girl

could suggest any probable reason for it. Not only had William never before absented himself at night, but never upon any occasion had he suffered his passion for solitary rambling to beguile him to any spot sufficiently distant to prevent his returning to the house before the usual hour of closing it for the night.

Mrs. Lambert remembered all this, and remembering also the strange manner in which he had left it that morning, or rather during the preceding night, she could not help sharing in some degree the fear which had evidently taken possession of Helen, namely that he had fled from the hateful tyranny of his father without any intention of returning.

Nevertheless a moment's reflection sufficed to persuade her that in the present state of affairs there would be no great difficulty in getting him to return; she knew how devotedly he was attached to his sister, and felt not the slightest doubt that he would hasten back to her as soon as the news of his father's death should reach him; and the suddenness of this event was so sure to make

it talked of far and near, that she felt no doubt that the report of it would very speedily overtake him.

Notwithstanding the long and confidential conversation which had taken place on the preceding day between herself and Mr. and Mrs. Bolton, Mrs. Lambert felt that she could not with propriety speak as openly to Helen in their presence respecting the motive of William's departure, and the certainty of his return, now that the cause of his aversion to his home was removed, as she could do if they were *tête-à-tête*; she therefore said, respectfully turning to the clergyman and his wife, "If you will kindly permit me to attend Miss Helen to the room in which she is to sleep, I think I could persuade her to undress and go to bed quietly, and to-morrow she will, I trust, be more composed, and more reasonable."

This suggestion was immediately acted upon; the gentle Mrs. Bolton led the way to her neat guest-chamber, placed a light upon the table, gave a silent kiss to the sobbing Helen, and retired, leaving the pale but perfectly composed Mrs. Lambert, and the

orphan girl she so fondly loved, alone together.

No sooner was the door closed upon them than Helen rushed into the arms of her nurse, and wept upon her bosom as she had often done when terrified by the harshness of her father in days of yore; and, as in days of yore, her sorrow was soothed, and her caresses returned with the tenderness of a mother. The healing effect of this unrestrained indulgence of feeling immediately produced the benefit anticipated. Helen, though still looking very miserable, became composed and reasonable, and instead of turning with all the bitterness of despair from the friendly and consoling words that were addressed to her, she now became as eager to listen as Mrs. Lambert was to speak of her absent brother.

"Now you are my own dear reasonable Helen again!" said the loving nurse, placing the orphan girl beside her, and looking fondly in the lovely young face so confidently turned towards her. "Now you will listen to reason, my darling child, and not to the inventions of your own frightened fancy."

"I will listen to you, my dear, dear Sarah Lambert!" replied Helen, fondly kissing her. "You never, as long as I can remember anything, have said to me any word that was not as kind as it was true, and as true as it was kind, and you never never will, of that I am very sure! But it is strange his going away so, just at this terrible time, isn't it, Sarah Lambert? Do you think that anything passed between them—any violent quarrel I mean—after I was gone to bed? At what time did papa come home?"

"Very late, my dear child," replied Mrs. Lambert, "and I am quite sure there was no quarrel, for I must have heard it if there had been; and I give you my honour that I heard nothing of the kind. Indeed I believe that William must have been gone to bed before his father came home, but of this I cannot speak with certainty, because I was very busy."

"It is a great great comfort to me to hear you say that, Sarah Lambert!" replied Helen, "for I was afraid—oh! dreadfully afraid—that they might have quarrelled, and that they might have fought!" and Helen trembled

from head to foot as she uttered the words, and hid her face on Mrs. Lambert's bosom.

"Set your dear heart at rest for ever from all such thoughts, my child!" returned her nurse, very solemnly. "I am sorry that you should have conceived such, even for a moment. It was the will of God that your father should die, Helen, and therefore he is dead. The suddenness of this event must naturally make it a great surprise—a great shock—to you, but such cases are by no means very uncommon, and greatly less surprising, I think, than it would have been either to you or to me to see William fighting with him. I cannot imagine, my dear child, how so wild a thought could ever have entered your head."

"My dear, dear Sarah Lambert," replied Helen, almost cheerfully, "I feel and understand the truth of every word you say; but it is easy enough for me to explain to you how this wild and terrible thought came into my head. It came in two ways, Sarah Lambert. One way was from the horrible fierce and angry looks of . . . of my poor father the last time I ever heard them speak

together, and the other was from the look—the fearful look—of my dear tortured brother, after the frightful conversation in which his mother's shame and his own degradation were so cruelly announced to him. Oh, Sarah Lambert! can I ever forget the fearful change that came over my poor brother's face when he confessed, with such terrible bitterness, that he hated him who had brought this shame upon him, and then reproached him with it?"

"Yes, my precious child!" replied Mrs. Lambert, solemnly, "I trust that you will forget that, and all else that has tended to destroy the joyous happiness which ought ever to be the portion of childhood! Be ever pure and innocent of sin, my sweet Helen, and then the years that are to come will atone for all that was evil in those which are past; and that has been much, very much, my poor child."

"But for a great while, you know, I had my dear mamma with me, and always dear William, and always you! Ought I not to be thankful for all that, Sarah Lambert?" replied Helen, again laying her head lovingly

on her nurse's shoulder. "And if my dear William comes back, and if you stay with me always, always, I don't think that I shall ever again complain of anything."

The unhappy woman, thus fondly 'loved in vain,' could not, with all the stern firmness of her character, prevent a tear from falling on the face of the loving, and fondly loved young creature from whom she was so firmly resolved to tear herself. But even at that bitter moment she remembered the will which her late master had taught her to expect would be found in his writing-desk, and instead of suffering more tears to fall, she cheerfully exclaimed, "My dear, dear Helen! Look up hopefully! We have all of us, in different ways, suffered a good deal of sorrow, I believe But I think the future will be better, Helen; and if it be so, if it indeed should be in any degree what I anticipate for you, I shall still be happy! Yes, Helen! happy, happy, happy!"

Helen very naturally thought that this burst of hopeful gladness, so unlike the usual quiet sedateness of Sarah Lambert's manner, arose from the vivid recollection of what they

had all suffered from the capricious violence of her father's temper, now removed from them for ever; but having never before heard her allude to her own share of suffering from this cause, she felt that this dearly-beloved nurse had always had more merit, as well as more suffering, than she had ever before given her credit for.

Again she caressed her tenderly, and again she exclaimed, that if William would but come back again, so that they might all three live on quietly together at the Warren House, she should be quite contented with her own share of happiness.

For one short moment—as the conscience-stricken woman listened to this innocent burst of young affection, and read in the sweet eyes that were fixed upon her, with all the eloquence of sincerity, the confirmation of the feelings it expressed—for one short moment, poor Sarah Lambert thought that the sins of the wretched Almeria might be for ever buried and forgotten in the grave of him who had caused them; but the vain illusion lasted no longer, and, when it was past, she said, in a voice which betrayed no

weakness of any kind, but which was in perfect accordance with the solemn wisdom of her words, "My dearest Helen! neither of the three can reasonably expect, or reasonably wish, that so it should be! You have several very near relations, Helen, although you have been hitherto very strangely kept in ignorance of their existence; and both the law of nature and the law of the land point them out as the persons to whose protection you must look for support, and by whose authority you must be guided. And this will be greatly more advantageous to you, Helen, than being left for ever in the hands of your old nurse."

"Then their protection must be extended to that old nurse also," returned Helen, while a bright flush dyed her cheeks, and such a light flashed from her eyes as Sarah Lambert had never seen emitted from them before.

"Concerning all that, my dear child," she replied, "we must for a while longer remain in ignorance. The best good-night I can now give you, my dearest Helen, is the assurance that I feel no doubt of your brother's return, as soon as he shall have heard the

news, which will be so quickly spread through the country as to make it pretty nearly impossible that he should not hear it soon. And now, then, sleep well, my darling child! Let what will happen to either of us, I do not think that either will ever quite forget the more than common love that there has been between us." One more loving kiss was then exchanged, and then they parted; the interview having produced effects as opposite as it is well possible to imagine on the minds of each; for Mrs. Lambert left Helen with a feeling of deeper misery than had ever, perhaps, rested on her mind before; for never before had she felt her to be so every-way deserving of her devoted love; while never had she felt such a profound conviction that the most imperative duty of her future life would be to separate herself from her for ever! And on the other hand, Helen laid her head upon her pillow, and dropt asleep, with the delightful feeling that the old friend she so truly loved, loved her most truly too, and that such being the case, there was little or no danger that any new friends would have the power, or will, to part them.

CHAPTER XVI.

ON awaking the next morning, the first thoughts of Helen were painfully confused. It was a minute or two before she clearly remembered where she was; and when, by degrees, all the circumstances of her perfectly new position arranged themselves in her mind with all the grave reality of truth, she felt as if she herself were as much changed, and as new as they were. The influence of her father's stern temper, harsh manners, and tyrannical will, had not only produced effects uniformly painful upon very nearly every hour of her past existence, but had apparently, in a great degree, changed her very nature too. Not only had his fearfully unfeeling temper made itself felt when living with his unhappy children, but

the crushing weight of his tyrannical caprices had been made to bear upon them even in his absence ; nor could all the influence nor all the power of Mrs. Lambert neutralize the effect of it.

The very remarkable personal advantages of both the children, as well as the terms of affectionate admiration in which the Bolton and Foster families spoke of them in the neighbourhood, was quite sufficient to have obtained for them many valuable friends ; and moreover, the manner in which they were left to grow up, under the care and companionship of servants, added a feeling of pity to the interest they were so well calculated to inspire. But all these friendly feelings were of no avail in benefiting the forlorn situation of the forsaken children at the Warren House ; for never did its tyrant master leave it without reiterating his commands that no strangers, of any rank, were to be permitted to enter its doors, and that the children were on no account to be suffered to hold intercourse with any persons in the neighbourhood, save and except the clergyman and the apothecary.

All this had, of course, been submitted to without resistance, but not during the last year or two without a very painful consciousness of hardship and restraint. This consciousness had, on the part of Helen, been felt more on her brother's account than her own. There is a natural diffidence about young girls, who have had no companions of their own age, which renders it much easier for them to yield to such discipline than to attempt resistance to it; and it would have been almost as likely for Helen to have taken possession of her father's boat during his absence, as to have ventured to look in the face of any of the forbidden individuals who resided in the neighbourhood.

But poor William was exactly the sort of boy to attract attention, and to enjoy with keen delight the riding and the shooting which had repeatedly been offered to him by many whose kindly natures led them to witness, with real pain, the many privations to which 'that magnificent-looking young fellow, William Rixley,' was obliged to submit.

The only horses he ever rode were un-

broken colts, lent to him by the neighbouring farmers, who declared that, somehow or other, the young chap could do more towards bringing them into order than they could; and one observing old man declared that the only likeness, as far as he could see, by which the young Rixley showed himself to be the son of the old one, was observable when the Warren House squire was enjoying a stiff gale at sea, and when his son was making a skittish young colt obey the rein, just as his father made the bounding boat obey the helm.

And the old man was right; for in this sort of enjoyment in danger lay the only point of intellectual resemblance between them. But the speculative eye of this old man was not the only one which watched the bold bearing of the beautiful, but neglected boy, with interest; and very many were the friendly hints which, directly and indirectly, he received, concerning the readiness with which such, or such, of his aristocratical neighbours would give him either hunting or shooting, by the loan of a horse, or the *entrée* to a preserve. But all these

friendly hints, though they made his heart beat and his eye sparkle, were one and all uniformly received with a sadly-whispered, but most positive refusal.

It is very possible that the fear of his brutal father's anger would not of itself have sufficed to ensure such constant obedience; but it had been made plain to the capacities of both William and his sister, that any transgression of the rules laid down for the regulation of their melancholy existence would infallibly be visited in such a way upon their much-loved Sarah Lambert, as to cause her great annoyance; and this was enough—always and for ever enough—to secure the obedience, not only of the gentle Helen, but of the fearless William likewise.

It was with wonderfully sudden strength and distinctness, that all this rushed upon the mind of Helen, as she awoke the next morning, and remembered that this terrible father *was dead* and could torture them no more!

It is a lamentably false doctrine which teaches parents to believe that their children ought to love them, and, in point of fact,

must love them, let them be treated as they may. Neither children nor wives, however strong they may feel the tie to be, which binds them to the tyrant parent, or the tyrant spouse, are, in any degree, removed beyond the reach of ordinary human feeling ; and those do but delude themselves who think it.

It was with nothing like a pang of sorrow that Helen remembered she was fatherless ; but neither was it with anything approaching the triumph of newly-liberated self-will. In fact she thought only of William, and o Sarah Lambert ; and the only portion of these new-born thoughts which personally concerned herself was that which led her to believe steadfastly in her true and loving heart, that now that she need be afraid of nobody she might do a thousand and thousand things which would be sure to please them both.

But that day, and the next, wore themselves away without bringing any tidings of William ; and poor Helen again began to feel very miserable about him, notwithstanding all the arguments adduced by M.

Lambert, to prove that the cause of his absenting himself being so well known to them, the certainty of that cause being removed ought to convince them that he would return as soon as the fact should reach him.

But the day following brought the Rev. Mr. Rixley to the parsonage, and the emotions produced by his arrival, and by the scenes which followed it, soon caused all lesser anxieties to be forgotten.

The Rev. Mr. Rixley was, in all respects, as totally unlike his deceased brother as it was well possible for one man to be unlike another. Yet he too had been, and indeed still was, extremely handsome; but in his case there was no combat between the fine regularity of his features and the expression of them. No one could possibly deny that he was a very handsome man, and it was not likely that many could be found who could, with the envious perversity of his late brother, feel any doubt as to his being, as we say of children, as good as he was handsome.

But, nevertheless, he looked as if his life had not been one of unbroken prosperity, for there was much more of anxious medi-

tation than of triumphant success in the expression of his countenance.

But there certainly is a sort of free-masonry among good men as well as among bad ones, and the Rev. Mr. Rixley and the Rev. Mr. Bolton had not long set face to face together before a sort of mutual feeling had been generated between them which led each to feel very sure that they should speedily both like and esteem the other.

Mr. Bolton evidently thought it proper to take it for granted that Mr. Rixley would be anxious to learn all the particulars which he could communicate respecting his late brother's very sudden death; and he expressed himself very much as if he had been making an apology, when stating how very little he knew personally either of his departed neighbour during his life, or of the manner of his death.

"It must, I am afraid, appear very strange and very unneighbourly, Mr. Rixley," said he, "that a neighbour, of so many years' standing, and one too who, excepting the excellent lady, his late wife, was the only instructor of his children, should know so

very little about your brother, as not to be able to tell you, with any degree of certainty, whether his health, previous to his late attack, was good or bad, but such is the case. Is it long since you last saw him, yourself, Mr. Rixley ? ”

“ Yes, sir,” replied his new acquaintance, “ it is many years since I last saw my brother, Mr. Beauchamp ; but at that time he certainly had the appearance of being an extremely healthy man, and one whom I should have thought very unlikely to die from such an attack as this seems to have been. He went to bed, you say, apparently in perfect health. It must therefore have been some sort of fit which carried him off ? ”

“ Yes, Mr. Rixley, I believe so. We have a very clever and experienced medical man among us who saw him after his death, and I understand that such was his opinion of the case.”

The conversation then went on to the more interesting subject of the deceased gentleman’s children, of whose very existence Mr. Rixley declared himself to have

been ignorant till the receipt of Mr. Bolton's letter ; but all discussion respecting them speedily and naturally ended by Mr. Rixley's saying, " My first business must be the examining the desk you have mentioned to me, in search of a will. If we find this, my path will of course be pointed out to me by its contents, and till I have made myself acquainted with this will, I think I would rather not see the little girl you have mentioned. The boy, I think you said, was not at home ? "

" No, Mr. Rixley, he is not, and the circumstances attending his departure are very painful," replied Mr. Bolton. " Your estrangement from your brother will doubtless have made you less acutely sensitive respecting all particulars relating to him, than would have been the case had things been otherwise between you ; but there was much in his manner of living which it is painful to remember, and to comment upon. This poor lad, who, if I mistake not, is about sixteen or seventeen years of age, is a natural son. But he is a boy that any father might be forgiven for being proud of. He has been

my pupil for several years, and I have found in him not only very superior and rare ability, but a very noble, though certainly a somewhat fiery temper. He has never been an inmate with me, and, of the many hours we have spent together, the great majority have, of course, been devoted to study. Nevertheless, I think I know enough of him to say that he possesses many fine qualities, and a warm and generous heart. But, for all that, it is quite certain that he was anything rather than an object of affection to your brother ; on the contrary, he was uniformly treated by him with very cruel neglect, and, on many occasions, with very cruel harshness also, and there is every reason to believe that he clandestinely left his father's house on the very night he died, in consequence of a most painful scene which had passed between them on the previous evening, the particulars of which have reached me ; and they have left me fully persuaded that the poor youth quitted the house of his father with no intention of returning to it. Nor will you, sir, greatly wonder at the vehemence of the poor boy's feeling when I tell

you, that it was during this scene, and in the presence of his young, and greatly-loved legitimate sister, that the disclosure of his being a natural son was made to him, accompanied, as I am assured, by a degree of unfeeling indignity which amounted to insult. This scene took place in the evening; the unfortunate boy went to his bed-room shortly afterwards, and has never, I believe, been seen since by any of the family."

"Poor boy! he must have suffered greatly!" replied Mr. Rixley. "Such a disclosure, and so suddenly made may well have produced such a result; and the poor fellow must be perfectly destitute, I presume."

"I presume so, too," replied Mr. Bolton, "save and except the conscious power of great ability which he must have carried with him. His father, it seems, had decided upon placing him as an usher in some country grammar-school. But with all his scholarship he was totally unfit for such a situation. And how he hoped to find the means of living, I know not. It is, however, almost impossible that the news of his

father's sudden death should not reach him ; and when it does, depend upon it he will immediately return to the Warren House."

" Yes, no doubt of it," replied Mr. Rixley, " and let us hope that the will you mention may make some provision for him. Of course I feel rather anxious to see this document. Shall we look for it, Mr. Bolton ?"

" That is the desk, sir, which is supposed to contain it," replied Mr. Bolton, pointing to an isolated box upon an isolated little table that stood before the book shelves on the opposite side of the room. " But I am every moment expecting a call from Mr. Lucas, the attorney, who has been occasionally employed by your late brother. I got him to put his seal on various depositories at the Warren House within a few hours after we discovered that its owner was dead, and yonder desk was among the number. I fully expected your arrival to-day, Mr. Rixley, and requested that he would call here, which he promised to do."

The conversation between the two clergymen then fell upon the peculiarly desolate condition of poor Helen ; and Mr. Rixley

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CHAPTER XVII.

was opened every recess in filled with papers, many of orney's rapid and experienced to be documents and memo-oss-like importance; nor were finding that most important y they were in search. This s the work of a London lawyer, Mr. Lucas; and the three gen- bent upon its examination were ignorant of its contents. as was desired to read it aloud, did, clearly and distinctly. It long will, considering the great f property disposed of by it, the occupying the largest portion. amble was evidently listened to with

pain by both the clergymen, but probably not with much surprise by either. Mr. Bolton, indeed, almost felt that he had heard it before, so precisely was it in accordance with Mrs. Lambert's statement respecting the feelings and intentions of her late master.

It very explicitly stated that his only motive for making the will at all was as a measure of precaution, lest, by possibility, his brother, or any of his brother's children, might inherit his property in case he died intestate. The preamble then proceeded to state that this possibility might arise from the fact of his having a natural son, whose existence would, of course, be no impediment to the succession of his brother, or his brother's family to the Beauchamp estate; and that as his legitimate daughter was born under apparently similar circumstances, inasmuch as he had lived with the mothers of both in great retirement, and that both had been called by his name, he deemed it safest to bequeath his said property by will to his daughter Helen Rixley Beauchamp, commonly called Helen Rixley.

Then followed in goodly legal style, and phrase, the important, "*give and bequeath*," followed by the enumeration of sundry estates familiarly known by the comprehensive phrase, "The Beauchamp property," all and every of which were bequeathed and settled upon his daughter Helen, and her heirs for ever.

The name of the testator and of three witnesses, with the seals of all duly appended then followed; having examined which, Mr. Lucas folded up the parchment, and for a moment held it in his hand, as if doubtful in whose custody he should place it; but this moment sufficed to decide him, and he presented it to Mr. Rixley, saying, "You, sir, as the natural guardian of the young lady, are the person in whose hands it would seem most proper to place this important document, till such time as the proper steps can be taken for proving it."

"If I can be of any use in proving the hand-writing of my brother, I shall be ready to do it," said Mr. Rixley, composedly, "but I would rather not be troubled by having the custody of the will. Either

Mr. Bolton or yourself, sir, might, I think, with more propriety undertake the care of it."

"Mr. Lucas was the lawyer employed by your late brother while he was in this neighbourhood," said Mr. Bolton, "and I think the desk itself, and all that it contained, had better be consigned to his keeping for the present. He will, too, be certainly the most desirable person to be employed in transacting the necessary business at Doctors' Commons."

"If I am to take this desk and its contents into my charge," replied the attorney, "I must beg to have a catalogue of the said contents taken in your presence, gentlemen."

Little as Mr. Rixley appeared desirous of mixing himself in his late brother's concerns, he could not object to so reasonable a proposal, and the contents of the desk were accordingly examined, and catalogued. It contained a few letters, and several bills, a few of these being apparently still due, but the rest having receipts appended to them in very proper business-like style. But, with

the exception of the will, the only document of any real consequence which they found was a fully authenticated certificate of the marriage of the late William Rixley Beauchamp with the mother of the young heiress.

"This, too, is by no means an unimportant document," said the lawyer, putting it into the hands of Mr. Bolton.

"Certainly not," replied the curate of Crumpton, passing it to Mr. Rixley.

"There is nothing equivocal in this," rejoined the lawyer again, receiving it, and carefully replacing it in the desk. "This document, and the will together, places the young lady in perfectly smooth water." He then rose, locked the desk, and put the key in his pocket."

"I came here on horseback, Mr. Bolton," he said, "and I will, therefore, leave this desk in your charge; but I will take an early opportunity of sending for it."

"I will not offer to spare you the trouble," replied Mr. Bolton, smiling, "for I would not wish to have any further responsibility thrown upon me respecting this important

desk. I will, however, give it house-room till you send for it."

This promise seemed to satisfy the lawyer ; and he took his leave as soon as he had received it.

The funeral was to take place on the following day ; but notwithstanding the amiable physiognomy of Mr. Rixley, and the very decided opinion conceived by Mr. Bolton that he was an exceedingly amiable man, the interval which must of necessity elapse before they parted seemed longer than the curate of Crumpton knew how to employ.

The statement made by Mrs. Lambert respecting the estrangement between the two brothers had been very completely confirmed by the demeanour of Mr. Rixley ; and, moreover, the fact that the so-recently-heard-of niece was endowed with the noble property which, but for her, must of necessity have belonged to himself and his children, caused Mr. Bolton to feel that the offering to present this obnoxious young intruder to her unknown uncle was but an unpromising device for enabling them to get through the

remainder of the day in a manner as little painful to all parties as might be.

But a very few moments' reflection convinced the worthy curate that, however little profitable, or however little pleasant it might be to bring these near, but unknown, relatives together, it was decidedly his duty to do it. All the circumstances of Helen's real position recurred to him. He remembered all the particulars related to him by Mrs. Lambert, as well as the personal confession which had been blended with the narrative; and he felt that whatever might have been the conduct of his very worthless parishioner to his brother, it could not exonerate Helen's uncle from the obvious duty of protecting so near a relative, under circumstances which so clearly showed that such protection was very greatly required.

After the silence of a minute or two, passed in meditation as to the best manner of stating the case, Mr. Bolton said, "I feel considerable reluctance, Mr. Rixley, to the taking advantage of the accidental circumstances which have brought us together, in order to dictate, or seem to dictate, to you the line of

conduct towards your young niece which I think you ought to pursue ; and believe me nothing but the persuasion that it is my duty would induce me to do it."

" I am persuaded of it, sir," replied Mr. Rixley, gently, but somewhat coldly. " Permit me, however, before you enter upon the subject," he continued, " to make you aware that the circumstances which led to the estrangement between my brother and myself were of no common kind, nor are they such as I could easily explain in their full extent to any one. I have, moreover, another observation to make, which is, that my brother's richly-endowed heiress cannot by possibility require any sort of assistance which it is in my power to give. She will, of course, become a ward of Chancery, and proper persons will be appointed to take care of her. Were she poor, instead of rich, Mr. Bolton, I might possibly feel, notwithstanding all that has passed, that it was my duty, as far as my very limited means would permit, to assist her."

" Bear with me patiently, my dear sir, even if I take the liberty of saying that I

differ from you entirely. The very peculiar advantages which both nature and fortune have bestowed upon your niece render her greatly more in need of your protection than she would be were she without them."

"I suspect there must be some fallacy in the reasoning which leads to so startling a conclusion," replied Mr. Rixley, with a quiet smile. "I should think," he added, "that the same protection under which this young lady has been living since the death of her mother might easily be secured to her still. I know that her late father's residence here has been by no means constant, or even regular, in its periodical recurrence; for though I have not seen him, I have heard of him frequently."

This speech embarrassed the good curate exceedingly. He had no intention whatever of communicating the confession of the unhappy Mrs. Lambert to any one. He could not doubt that it had been made to him solely for the purpose of inducing him to find a more fitting protector for Helen than she herself could be; and could he have obtained this protection from her uncle without

disclosing the principal reason which caused him to seek it, he would have been relieved from a very painful task. But he now saw, and felt, that this was impossible ; and he, therefore, though not without great reluctance, distinctly stated to Mr. Rixley the reasons which made the removal of Helen from the neighbourhood an event so very greatly to be desired for her.

Mr. Rixley plainly showed, both by his heightened complexion and his kindling eye, that the depravity which could thus consign a daughter to the charge of a woman so circumstanced was felt by him as no light addition to all the foregone causes of indignation, which for years had been accumulating in his memory against his brother.

He positively shuddered as the clear statement of the facts developed to him all the hard corruption of heart which it was so well calculated to prove, and Mr. Bolton flattered himself that he had conquered.

Great, therefore, was his disappointment when, withdrawing his hands, with which for a moment he had covered his face, Mr. Rixley said, " What you tell me, sir, is very

terrible, and I wish I could have died without hearing it! Unhappily I wanted no further proof of depravity in this man to justify the estrangement between us, which I have so vainly attempted to conquer, as far as my own feelings were concerned, for long, long years of life. It was his conduct to our angelic mother which first turned my heart against him; in comparison to which his conduct towards myself I can truly say has counted as nothing, although it has been marked with unceasing hostility on his part. And now, when I hoped that such painful—such guilty—feelings might be forgotten, and buried for ever, I have the misfortune of learning what is, perhaps, more atrocious than all which has gone before it! But I ought to beg your pardon for this weakness of lamentation and murmuring. It would have been fitter that I should have received this intelligence without making any commentary on it. But I am sorry to perceive that we draw a very different practical inference from it. It is evident that you think this crowning trait of infamy on the part of my brother ought to induce me to take his

daughter to my heart and my hearth, and make her the companion of my own girl. Mr. Bolton, I cannot do this—it is repugnant to my feelings, and alarming to my conscience. How dare I bring an unhappy young creature, who has passed every hour of her life in such companionship, to be the daily and hourly associate of my own innocent child? I dare not, I cannot do it!'

"If such be your view of the case, sir," replied Mr. Bolton, gravely, "I will say no more. Heaven tempers the wind to the shorn lamb; and the pure and innocent creature who unfortunately inspires such feelings will not be the victim of them. I am as full of hope as you are of fear concerning her: and we will now let the subject drop. This is a heavy day for you, Mr. Rixley; nor is it without pain to me. But there are many hours of it to be got through yet; and I think it would do us both good if we could contrive to get a little air and sunshine without committing the obvious indecorum of being seen by the villagers. But I think, if you would trust yourself to my guidance, I could take you down to the

beach by a path that I have myself formed from the bottom of my garden, in which it is extremely unlikely that we should meet any one."

"The doing so would be a great relief to me," replied the other, "for I confess to you that my head aches very severely." A statement to the truth of which the pallid countenance of the speaker gave ample testimony.

Mr. Bolton immediately rose, and prepared to lead the way; but Mr. Rixley retained his seat, and made a movement with his hand, which indicated that he had something more which he wished to say before they set out. Mr. Bolton obeyed it; and then, with a little hesitation and a little embarrassment, his companion said, "Do not, if you can help it, my dear sir, consider me either as capricious or inconsistent, if I tell you that *now* I should wish to see my niece. Till the question of her becoming one of my family had been fairly discussed and finally decided, I wished to avoid this; as, otherwise, my averseness to receiving her might have been attributed to personal prejudice

against her. But there is now no danger that you should so mistake me, and therefore, by your good leave, I will see her."

Though, after what had passed, Mr. Bolton was inclined to think this a very useless ceremony, and only calculated to produce pain to poor Helen, he, nevertheless, did not feel justified in refusing to do what was asked of him; and being very sure that he should find the unconscious heiress with his kind-hearted wife, he went to the usual sitting-room of that truly-estimable personage, and found Helen, as he expected, sitting close beside her, and looking all the better for the consolatory talk to which she had been listening.

During the short interval which had intervened between leaving the uncle and finding the niece, Mr. Bolton had decided that he would not as yet communicate to Helen the great change which had taken place in her condition. He was well aware, indeed, that no form of words which he could use in announcing this could possibly convey to the young girl the immensity of the change which awaited her; but he

wished her uncle to see her unchanged in look and manner by any such startling announcement; and all he said was, "Come with me, my dear Helen; your uncle wishes to see you."

"Have you heard anything about William, sir?" was her reply.

"Go, Helen! go, my dear," said Mrs. Bolton, gently, but in a tone that had some authority in it. "I am very glad," she added, "that he wishes to see you. He is the nearest relation you have left, my dear child, and it is greatly to be desired that he should take some interest in you."

"No! William is the nearest relation I have left, and no uncle in the whole wide world can ever take so much care of me as he would do, if he would but come home again!" exclaimed Helen, somewhat vehemently.

"Come with me, my dear," said Mr. Bolton, extending his hand towards her. "It is not behaving well to keep your uncle waiting."

Helen's only reply to this was instantly rising from her chair, and putting her hand

in that of Mr. Bolton, which was extended towards her; but not a word more was spoken between them before the parlour door was opened, and Helen found herself standing in the presence of her uncle.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE heart of the young girl beat painfully ; but that of the relative before whom she was brought to present herself appeared, by his attitude and occupation, to be in a state of very perfect composure.

Mr. Rixley had taken up a book as soon as he had found himself alone ; this might, in some degree, have been a matter of habit, but it was also a fair indication of the real state of his feelings towards the child he had sent for. His reason for sending for her was precisely what he had stated to Mr. Bolton. He felt no personal interest in her, and he would willingly have altogether forgotten her existence ; a state of mind to which he flattered himself that his family, as

well as himself, would very speedily attain : nor did he feel any misgivings as to the possibility that the approaching interview would make any alteration either in his wishes or intentions.

But in this he was mistaken.

Helen was very pale when she entered the room, and a feeling made up of one-third of youthful timidity, and two-thirds of averseness to the interview, caused her to show nothing of her magnificent eyes, save their long lashes ; moreover, instead of approaching her uncle, she stopped short, and stood immoveably still, within one step of the door.

It would be difficult to do justice to the feelings with which Mr. Rixley gazed at her.

In the first place, he had expected to see a little girl ; but Helen, though little more than thirteen years old, was already as tall as the majority of women ; and though very slight, there was an air of quiet, graceful firmness in her carriage, which, even more than her height, prevented her from having, in any degree, the appearance of a child.

But this difference between what he saw, and what he expected to see, could only produce surprise; and it was a far different emotion that Mr. Rixley experienced. It was not like the effect of looking upon what was new to his eyes, but upon what was familiar. Most familiar, and most dear, did the features of Helen appear to her uncle; for they were the features of his mother. Most wonderfully striking, both in form and in expression, was the resemblance between his almost idolized mother and this lovely girl; and it was the more striking to him from the fact, that the late Mrs. Rixley had not only married at a very early age, but had retained her beauty in an extraordinary degree to the time of her death.

Such a resemblance to a mother, so freshly remembered, must have produced a strong effect on most men, especially when suddenly appearing before them for the first time; but in this case, it was no ordinary amount of feeling that was awakened. All the most interesting circumstances of Mr. Rixley's life had been influenced by, and mixed up with his mother. The untoward,

and early-displayed temper of his brother, had of necessity led to such a difference in their mother's feelings towards them, as bound the younger to her with more than common love and devotion, while it produced feelings in the elder so nearly approaching hatred both to mother and brother, as to poison the peace of both.

The consciousness that this gentle mother, and ever-faithful friend, had often endured a sort of domestic martyrdom while watching over his interests, had never left him, and her image lived as freshly in his memory as if he had lost her but yesterday. It was not very extraordinary, therefore, that this sudden, and most unexpected appearance of her living picture should completely overpower him. For one moment he looked at her, as if actually gazing on a supernatural appearance, and there was a wildness in his eye that almost partook of terror. But in the next, he burst into tears, and, rushing towards her, caught her in his arms, and pressed her to his heart, as if he had found a long-lost daughter of his own. "Oh, my child! my child!" he exclaimed.

"How came I to forget that, though you were *his* daughter, you were the grandchild of my angelic mother!—Helen! dearest, dearest Helen! You are her living image!—For God's sake do not hate me!—If you will let me, my sweet girl, I will be a father to you! My dear Anne will be a sister, and you will love your aunt, Helen, even if you cannot love me, for everybody loves her.—But I have frightened you, my dear one! Frightened you by my vehemence!—You will not, you cannot love me!"

"But I do love you. I love you already!" cried Helen, earnestly. "But you must not weep because you have found me. I cannot bear to see your tears. And yet I love you the better for them. I see," she added, while her own tears flowed still faster than his, "I see that you loved your mother, just as I loved mine. For I can sit and cry by the hour together when I think of her! But indeed—and indeed—I ought not to cry now, for I feel that God has sent a great blessing to me, but though I do cry, I am very, very thankful!"

This most unexpected scene had passed

before the eyes of Mr. and Mrs. Bolton with such astounding vehemence and rapidity, that for a moment they both looked bewildered; but nothing could be more genuine, nothing more cordial than the joyful congratulations which followed it.

Mr. Bolton, who but a few short minutes before had felt so heavy at heart from the failure of all his efforts to propitiate the good offices of the only person who could properly undertake the charge of the desolate young heiress, now looked and spoke as if every care he had in the world had been removed, and the two clergymen cordially shook hands together as if for the first time.

And truly it was for the first time that they had done so with any real and cordial sympathy of feeling; for on the only subject of personal interest that was in common between them, their opinions and their feelings had hitherto been greatly at variance, Mr. Bolton's earnest desire being that the personal charge of the orphan heiress should be undertaken by her uncle, while Mr. Rixley's earnest desire was that he might have nothing whatever to do with her.

Now, however, it speedily became evident that all their views, hopes, wishes, and intentions on this subject were in the most perfect accord, and the intercourse between them became cordial and unembarrassed accordingly. Nor was the gentle-hearted Mrs. Bolton in any degree less pleased than her husband by this additional gleam of sunshine which seemed to have fallen like a ray from heaven upon the head of the so lately desolate Helen, and no one that had looked upon the little party, that now sat so lovingly together, would have easily believed that the kindly feelings so legible in the eyes of all were not yet half an hour old.

It was strange that the sudden change of purpose which had been so seemingly resolute as that of Mr. Rixley should bring with it so much deep-felt delight; but never did a fine expressive countenance more unequivocally express happiness than his did as his eyes fondly rested upon his beautiful niece. "And your name is her name!" he exclaimed joyously. "How little did I anticipate the pleasure which this gives me!"

"Was your dear mother's name, Helen,

then?" said his niece innocently. "And it was the name of my mother, too," she added.

"No, my child," replied her uncle, "her name was not Helen, but it was Beauchamp, and your name is Beauchamp."

"No it isn't!" returned Helen, looking disappointed, "My name is Helen Rixley."

"She knows nothing about it as yet," said Mr. Bolton, replying to the inquiring glance of his new acquaintance. "There has been no time to tell her. When I carried your permission for her to come to you, I thought much more of that than of the . . . than of anything else, Mr. Rixley."

"I thank you. I believe everybody has behaved much better in this business than myself. I thank you much for letting me have the pleasure of announcing the real state of the case to Miss Beauchamp. For you are Miss Beauchamp, my sweet Helen, and you inherit the property, as well as the name of your grandmother's family."

"Do I?" said Helen, looking rather puzzled. "Why do not you inherit it, uncle? You are her son, and I am only her grand-daughter."

"You are a bad lawyer, Helen. As the child of my mother's *eldest* son, you inherit the property by your father's will."

"Oh! that is the law, is it?" she replied. "And I suppose the dear old Warren House is what you call the property, and if that is the case I hope you will sometimes come and live there with me,—and Mr. Bolton, and Mrs. Bolton, and all the dear children will very often come and see us. I know they will, because they are always so very, very kind. And when dear William comes back, he, and I, and dear good Sarah Lambert will all be as happy as the day is long!"

A shade seemed to pass over the countenance of Mr. Rixley at the mention of William, and a deeper shade still over that of Mr. Bolton at the name of Sarah Lambert; for they both felt that there were difficulties to be overcome before the young heiress could be established with all the decorum as well as with all the liberality and refinement which her position required.

A glance was exchanged between them, but for a moment they were both silent, and

then Mr. Rixley said, "You may depend upon it, my dearest Helen, that all those who will have the management of your affairs before you become of age, will be anxious to do everything in their power to make you comfortable and happy. But you have a great deal more to learn about your own affairs before we shall be able to make you fully comprehend the great change which has taken place in your situation. For instance, my dear child, though it is quite true the Warren House has become your property, you will, I think, young as you are, agree with me in thinking that it will not be the most proper and suitable residence as your home, when I tell you that you are also become the possessor of a very noble mansion called Beauchamp Park, where your ancestors have lived for many, many generations, and where your grandmother, through whom you inherit the property, was born. This Warren House was bought by your father, comparatively speaking, a very few years ago."

"Well! I am sorry for that," replied Helen, with a little gentle sigh, "because I

don't think I shall ever like any other house so well—particularly the schoolroom, you know, Mr. Bolton, where we always were so very quiet and comfortable, William, and I, and dear Sarah Lambert! However," she added, "I believe it would be very silly to care very much about a house. Of course we should grow to love any house, if we had the people we loved with us—and that I shall always have, shall I not, dear uncle?"

This was a very embarrassing question, and the more so because Mr. Rixley was a very sincere man, and would have found it difficult to say "Yes" when he meant "No." And he certainly was in no doubt as to the fact that it would not do for a young lady, aged thirteen and a half, the heiress of the Beauchamps of Beauchamp Park, with a clear revenue of ten thousand a-year, to set up housekeeping with a runaway boy if she could find him, even though he was the natural son of her father, or with a nurse who had been that dissolute father's mistress.

All therefore that he could reply to this eager burst of affection was to tell her, kindly,

but vaguely, that he thought she had a good chance, wherever she was, of being loved by the people around her, and therefore there was little doubt of her loving them in return.

But vague as this was, it was all he could venture to say, and Mr. Bolton spared him the embarrassment of discussing the arrangements for her future home at this early period of their acquaintance by observing that it was time for them to set off upon their projected walk, if they meant to reach the picturesque spot he had mentioned; a suggestion to which Mr. Rixley readily agreed, and the two gentlemen set off together in a much better state of mind for tasting the beauties of nature than if they had done so before the introduction of Helen to her uncle. Nevertheless they had to converse on topics that were in no trifling degree painful to both. The idea that this dear and precious child should have been beguiled into loving her father's mistress with all the tender affection of a warm young heart was very painful to Mr. Rixley, and he expressed his grief and indignation strongly.

"I can neither blame your feelings, my dear sir, nor be surprised at the strength of them," said Mr. Bolton. "But let us be thankful," he added, "that you have been prevailed upon to see this dear child, and that her beautiful features have achieved the effect of recalling your honoured mother's image."

His companion was silent for a moment, but was evidently, and even strongly affected by these words; and then said, "Yes, Mr. Bolton, I am thankful—very deeply thankful—and the more so when I remember how very near I was to passing by on the other side. Nothing will satisfy me now," he continued, "but removing her from the neighbourhood of this woman at once, and receiving her as a member of my own family."

"And that," returned the greatly comforted Mr. Bolton, earnestly, "that is precisely what I have ventured to wish, and to hope, from within about an hour after I made your acquaintance. And take my word for it, Mr. Rixley, the more you see and know of this poor child, the more you will rejoice at her having become known to

you. Fortunately there can, I presume, be no difficulty in constituting you her personal as well as her natural guardian?"

"No, there will be no difficulty about that, I dare say," returned Mr. Rixley. "The funeral of her father is to take place to-morrow," he continued, "and on the following day I purpose setting off on my return to London, and will take her with me. Our home there is not a splendid one, for we are not rich people, Mr. Bolton, but I think we shall be able to make her comfortable, and she will have the advantage of being within reach of the best masters. Moreover, if you will venture to trust a father's report, you may have the satisfaction of believing that your young favourite will find a nice sort of sister in my daughter. But you must not take all this upon trust, my good friend, but must come up to see how we are going on, with your own eyes. We owe you much, Mr. Bolton, and I should be sorry to think that Helen should not still benefit by your friendship."

Their walk was both long and pleasant, for their conversation was in no danger of

flagging for want of matter, and proved equally agreeable and satisfactory to both parties.

On their return to the parsonage, however, they found that poor Helen was again plunged in very bitter grief not only from the prolonged absence of her brother, but on account of the very unsatisfactory tidings which she had at length received from Mrs. Lambert.

Her nurse, who really seemed almost as anxious as herself, had promised when she parted with her on the preceding evening, to get one of the many fishermen who lived in the village, to make inquiries in the town of Falmouth as to whether William had been seen there, for it had occurred to her as probable that if he had left his father's house with the hope of finding some employment which might maintain him out of it, Falmouth would be the place where he would in the first instance be likely to seek for it.

And this conjecture, as it seemed, had been perfectly justified by the result, for her envoy had returned with the intelligence, that the poor lad had been seen and recognized

at Falmouth while in earnest conversation with a party of sailors at the port, during the afternoon of the day in which he had left the Warren House.

But her intelligence went no further, and could therefore scarcely be said to have afforded his anxious sister any consolation at all; for, as she truly said, he could not have remained many hours in Falmouth without hearing of the event which they expected would cause his immediate return upon his becoming acquainted with it, and his not returning proved only too plainly that he had not remained there long enough for the intelligence to have reached the town before he had quitted it, which reasoning, together with the profession of the persons with whom he had been seen conversing, went far towards proving that he had probably embarked and put to sea before the intelligence which it was hoped would cause his return could have reached him. Should this indeed be the case, how terribly distant, and how terribly vague, did her hope of seeing him again become!

This idea, which was much too well

founded to be reasonably combated, affected her so deeply that Mrs. Bolton thought it would be best for all parties that her uncle should not see her under the influence of a sorrow so vehement and in which it was so perfectly impossible that he could sympathise; and therefore, at the earnest persuasion of her kind hostess, the weeping young heiress again laid her head upon her pillow, as little mindful of her newly acquired importance in the world, as if she had been three years old, instead of thirteen and a half.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON the morning of the funeral, Mrs. Bolton carefully guarded the door of Helen's room, in the hope that the poor girl might remain unconscious of what was going on till the ceremony was over, which, as it had been fixed for an early hour, she thought might be managed without any great difficulty. Not, indeed, that Mrs. Bolton so little understood either the feelings or the character of Helen as to suppose that she would either feel or affect any vehement grief on the occasion ; but she knew that the poor girl had suffered, and was still suffering greatly from the absence of her brother, and even the scene of the preceding day with her newly-found uncle, though soothing and consolatory in

no ordinary degree, had evidently caused her considerable agitation, and Mrs. Bolton was not at all mistaken in thinking that the more quiet she was kept during this last day at Crumpton, the more fit she would be for her journey to London on the morrow.

But fate did not second the kind intentions of the curate's wife, for within a few minutes after the arrival of the professional officials, with their hearse, and their mourners, at the Warren House, the quiet mansion of the village priest became the scene of a tumult which might have aroused a sounder sleeper than Helen.

She was awakened by the noise of many voices all speaking vehemently together, and started up in her bed to listen; for it instantly occurred to her that some news had arrived respecting her brother. She sprang instantly from her bed, dressed herself with the least possible delay, and, totally forgetting Mrs. Bolton's gentle injunction to remain quietly in her room till she came for her, rushed down the stairs, and on reaching the little hall at the bottom of them found herself amidst a group of men,

two or three of whom were sailors; and one of these was the favourite boatman of her deceased father.

Mr. Bolton and Mr. Rixley, who had been at breakfast in the parlour when the noise began, were now in the midst of them, and evidently endeavouring to comprehend what they were saying, which, from their all talking together, was no easy task.

“Is it about William? Does anybody know anything about William?” cried Helen, stopping short on the last stair but one, and thereby enabling herself, poor child, to be both seen and heard by those to whom she addressed herself.

The boisterous, and now brutal-looking fellow, called by his late patron, Commodore Jack, and known in the village as John Cummings, was the individual who undertook to answer her.

“Know anything about him?” he roared in reply, in the stupendous voice which he prided himself in making heard in the stiffest gale that could blow. “I know anything about him? I think we know enough! The infernal imp got up in the middle of

the night, and murdered his father, and then jumped out of the window and started for Falmouth, where he got a berth on board some vessel that was short of hands, and he is now, doubtless, hugging himself for his exploit on the high seas. He thinks he has cheated the hangman, mayhap, but he will be caught, if there is justice either in heaven or earth, and I shall have the glory of seeing him hung before I die."

That these dreadful words were listened to with horror and dismay may easily be credited, but for a moment it was in awe-struck silence. And the next sound that was heard was that caused by the fall of Helen from the place where she stood, upon the stone floor of the hall.

There were by this time many persons assembled in this little hall, including the whole of the small household, with the exception of the nurse and her charges, with Mr. and Mrs. Bolton and their guest; but the majority of those who already filled the room, and many more who were endeavouring to force their way into it from without, consisted of the villagers, particularly that

portion of them who gained their living as fishermen, and as sailors.

Several of this motley throng made a movement towards the prostrate and insensible Helen; but it was her uncle who first reached her, and raising her in his arms carried her into the parlour.

Mrs. Bolton followed them, but the master of the house remained amidst his boisterous guests who were greatly too much excited to listen to his gentle remonstrances and entreaties, that they would retire.

Finding that it was utterly impossible to get rid of them, he addressed himself to John Cummings, and in an accent of pastoral authority, desired to know for what reason he thus forced himself into his house, and on what ground he had dared to blast the character of an absent, but most estimable young man, by uttering the wild statement which had produced so alarming an effect on his young sister?

Notwithstanding the vehement excitement of the rude fellow he addressed, Mr. Bolton was too much respected in his parish for any inhabitant of it to answer him uncivilly, and

even Commodore Jack took his hat off as he replied, "Please your reverence, I should not do what I am doing in regard to coming here, nor I should not say what I have said in regard to the wickedness that has been done, if I had not warrant for it. I trust your reverence will not be putting my late honoured master and patron under the ground this blessed day, before you have sent for the coroner and had the body properly examined; and saving your presence, sir, it will be at your own peril if you do, for as sure as my name's John Cummings, we'll have him up again."

Mr. Bolton felt puzzled and looked distressed. "Will you tell me," said he, "on what ground it is that you have conceived this very strange and improbable idea? Mr. Foster, who is a very skilful practitioner, has seen the body, and if it had exhibited any appearance to justify the strange idea you have conceived, you may be very sure that he would have perceived it. Will you tell me, Cummings, what it was that first put this thought into your head?"

"Yes, your reverence, you have all the

right to ask, and I hav'n't the leastest objection to answer. The reason why I think the sudden death of my late patron and master was nowise natural is this. The day before he died, or was put to death, he passed above ten hours in my company in his boat, and if I ever seed a man, gentle or simple, in the very topmost enjoyment of health and strength it was Squire Rixley that day."

"I have no doubt that your statement is perfectly true, John Cummings," replied Mr. Bolton, "but take my word for it, that no medical man would tell you that he was the less likely to die of apoplexy on that account. On the contrary, indeed, I think it very likely that many persons might think ten hours of exercise, and perhaps of violent exertion, for the sea was rough, and your master was famous you know, for never sparing himself—many people, I say, might think this very likely to be the cause of the fit that carried him off."

"God bless your heart, Mr. Bolton! But you, sir, d'ye see, asking your pardon, are a parson, and sea-work that might seem likely

enough to a gentleman of your cloth to be darnation difficult and dangerous, would come like child's play to such a gentleman as Mr. Rixley. And then, sir, by your leave, in the next place, I can't find out that Mr. Foster, who is, no doubt of it, a first-rate gentleman in his way, I can't find out that he ever did, as one may say, examine the dead gentleman at all. He could not stay, as Rebecca Watkins tells me, above a minute or two in the room, and that minute or two most likely came very quick upon the death, and everybody knows that it is not just at first like, that the symptoms of poisoning shows themselves, and *that* I, for one, know from more than hearsay, for I have seen with my own eyes a dead man that was poisoned, both soon after the death, and two days later, and the difference was no joke, I can tell you."

"But why, if you have had this notion in your head, did you not mention it earlier?" said Mr. Bolton. "Only as late as yesterday morning Mr. Foster might, I know, have seen the body without any inconvenience; but now the undertakers have finished all

their preparations, and such an examination could not take place at present, without producing a very disagreeable effect. Mr. Rixley's own brother is here for the purpose of attending the funeral, and such a circumstance could not take place without shocking him greatly."

"I can't help that, sir," said the resolute John Cummings, "I hope I should be as loath as another to shock any gentleman's feelings, without due cause for it, and as to the charge of delay on my part, Mr. Bolton, I think I can explain the reason for my not having any suspicion at first, and then letting the suspicion get hold of me afterwards. The reason was this, sir: We all of us, we Crumpton people I mean, know Rebecca Watkins, who has been, off and on, a servant at the Warren House for years and years, and a thorough good sort of body she is, and one whose word I would take as surely as that of anybody I know, for there is nothing like falsehood in her. And she it was, please your reverence who first put this question into my head."

"What question?" said Mr. Bolton,

rather impatiently, "you surely forget, John Cummings, that the funeral of your late master is very indecently stopped by the strange conduct you are pursuing."

"I forget nothing, your reverence," replied the man. "One thing that I can never forget is, that let him have been what he might to others, he was ever the sailor's friend. I forget nothing, your reverence; and if you had heard Rebecca Watkins say what I heard her say this morning, I greatly misdoubt if you would ever have forgotten it, either. We were all, that is a many of us, talking together upon this sudden and awful change from all the might of manhood, caring not a button for the stiffest breeze that could blow, and the horrid stillness of a corpse stretched helpless on the bed of death! 'Well now, to be sure,' said Rebecca Watkins, 'there must have been something queer going on among 'em all at the Warren House. There was the squire, the very day before the night of his death, going down to the beach, and into his dear boat, looking for all the world as if he intended to live for ever; and there was that dainty boy Wil-

liam, with his handsome face, and his eyes full of tears, making much of his sister, for all the world as if he expected that he never should see her again. Well then, what follows next? why who should I meet upon the cellar stairs, just as I was going to set off home for the night, but William? I axed him if I should draw some beer for him, for he looked as white as a sheet, and I truly thought that he had worn himself out with his walking, and had'nt strength enough to get down to the beer barrel and up again. But he only seemed to want to get rid of me, and said Thankey, thankey, Rebecca, it's your going home time. I wou'd rather draw the beer myself,' and then, your reverence, she went on to tell us that when she went back to her work in the morning, the first news she heard was, that master William had let himself down from the window by the help of his sheets tied together, and was off, nobody knowed where. And then the next thing that come upon her was finding the master dead in his bed."

"Startling events both, no doubt of it, John Cummings. But I see not why you

should fancy that there was any connexion between them," replied Mr. Bolton.

" You have not quite heard all Rebecca's story yet," resumed the sailor, doggedly. " I don't rightly remember how the matter came out, whether the people about got to asking her questions, or whether it come out because her heart was too full to keep it in; but before she finished, she gave us plain enough to understand that there had been sharp and bitter words between the father and son. And now I have said my say about my poor master; he was the sailor's friend, but I won't answer for his never having done or said what he had better not. By Rebecca Watkins' account, who can hear through a key-hole, I suppose, as well as another, the squire was in a passion with the boy for some provoking trick or another, and then he twitted him with being base-born, which he didn't ought to have done, for certain, but the young chap, she says, was downright mad with rage, and she says, too, that if she don't greatly mistake, she heard him as good as threaten his life. Well, sir, and what hap-

pens within a trifle more than twenty-four hours afterwards? Why, the father is found dead in his bed, and the son, after jumping out of the window, and scrambling his way by hook or by crook to Falmouth, is seen talking with sailors on the quay, and I'll bet fifty to one that he is sailing away by this time to the other side of the world, perhaps."

This long statement, which, though rapidly uttered, was pronounced with great distinctness, had been listened to with greedy ears by the thick-packed crowd who had forced their way into Mr. Bolton's hall, and a sort of groan was uttered at its conclusion which very plainly testified the deep interest which they all took in the narrative, as well as the general persuasion that what the speaker had uttered deserved the deepest attention.

Mr. Bolton was instantly aware of this fact; and thoroughly well knowing the self-willed temperament of the population, he felt that, however absurd, he believed their suspicions to be, it would not do to attempt to extinguish them either by the voice of

authority, or by the reasonings of common sense. After the pause of a moment he replied, "My good friends, I think you all know me too well to believe that I should be less anxious to discover the truth in this matter, than yourselves. I should not be doing my duty, however, if I concealed from you that I consider you to be utterly wrong and mistaken in your suspicions. I know William Rixley well, better, believe me, than it is possible you can do, and this knowledge renders it, I may say, impossible for me to believe him guilty of the crime you all seem disposed to lay to his charge; for if this were not the case, I feel sure that you would indignantly reject such an imputation, thrown as it is upon an absent boy who has no power to defend himself."

"We don't want to be cruel or unjust towards man, woman, or child," cried a voice from the farthest corner of the hall, "but neither would it be right to pass over such strange things as we have heard without examining a little into them. I vote that we should none of us believe the young

fellow to be guilty till such time as we have got proof against him."

"Agreed," cried John Cummings, in a voice that might have been heard from the mast head of a man-of-war. "Agreed! and the first thing to do by the way of getting at proof, is examining the body of the dead man. If he is found to have died by the visitation of God, why then, in God's name, let his body be laid peaceably in the earth, and let us pray, like good Christians, for the peace of his soul. But if, on proper examination, things should turn out contrary, and that poison should be found within him, why in that case we must have a proper coroner's inquest, and then, after the jury shall have heard all the particulars, we shall get a proper verdict against the murderer, known or unknown."

"Ay, ay, no doubt of it," replied many voices in chorus.

"Then be it as you wish, my good friends," replied the clergyman. "I hope and believe," he continued, "that you will find yourselves altogether mistaken in your suspicions, but as this painful idea has evi-

dently got possession of your minds, it is best that you should be satisfied on the subject, even at the cost of some inconvenience."

"And that is spoken like a reasonable gentleman," returned Cummings, "and it is what we expected, and looked for, from your reverence; and I thank you, sir, in the name of the parish, and specially of all the sailors."

"But let me add one word to what I have already said," resumed Mr. Bolton. "It is proper that you should all of you know that the next of kin to the late Mr. Rixley is now in this house. This gentleman was his own brother, and of course nothing can be done in the business, either by you or by me, without consulting him upon it."

"I won't be balked in the examination of the body for all the brothers on the face of the earth," said Cummings. "But we don't want to do nothing in the dark; contrary-wise altogether, so your reverence is welcome to tell just all that has passed here to all whom it may concern, and the whole world

beside, so we will let you go, sir, in peace and quiet, to make the communication in any way as you may think fit, and meanwhile we will, some of us, be off to look after the doctor, and then, if his judgment is not clear against it, we must summon the coroner."

The invading party then elbowed and shouldered each other out of the house, and Mr. Bolton joined the anxious party in the parlour, conscious that he had nothing to tell them at all calculated to remove any of the painful feelings, from which he knew they must be suffering.

END OF VOL I.

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